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Athletics and Social Order in Sparta in the Classical Period

This article seeks to situate the athletic activities of Spartiates and their unmarried daughters during the Classical period in their broader societal context by using theoretical perspectives taken from sociology in general and the sociology of sport in particular to explore how those activities contributed to the maintenance of social order in Sparta. Social order is here taken to denote a system of interlocking societal institutions, practices, and norms that is relatively stable over time. Athletics was a powerful mechanism that helped to generate consensus and to socialize and coerce individuals. It thus induced compliance with behavioral norms on the part of both females and males and thereby contributed meaningfully to the maintenance of social order in Sparta. Athletics inculcated conformity to norms that called for females to be compliant, beautiful objects of male desire. Athletics had an equally profound effect on Spartan males because it inculcated compliance with norms that valorized subordination of the individual to the group, playing the part of the soldier, and meritocratic status competition. Athletics may well have also to some degree empowered both Spartan females and males, but its liberatory dimensions can easily be unduly amplified. There is an ever-present dialectic in athletics, between its ability to reinforce norms that underpin the prevailing social order and its ability to foster individual autonomy. In the case of Sparta, the balance in that dialectic always inclined very much toward the former.

1. INTRODUCTION

Lycurgus made it clear that happiness was the reward of the brave, misery the reward of cowards. For whenever someone proves a coward in other cities, he has only the bad reputation of being a coward, but the coward

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goes to the same public places as the brave and takes his seat and joins in physical exercise, as he likes. But in Sparta everyone would be ashamed to accept a coward as a messmate or as an opponent in a wrestling match. Frequently such a man is not picked when they select teams for ball games, and in choruses he is relegated to the most ignominious positions.¹

Xen. *Lac.* 9.3–5, cf. Nicolaus of Damascus *FGrH* 90 F103 Z144.12

A Spartiate who had proved himself to be a coward had violated a norm that was of fundamental importance among the *homoioi*.² This violation was punished by exclusion from the community of Spartiates, and that exclusion took the form of being left out of *sysitia*, wrestling matches, and ball games and being put in the least honorable spots in choruses. The fact that the inferior status of cowards manifested itself in large part in athletics makes it evident not just how important this activity was to the identity of Spartiates, but also that athletics was used as a means of social control in Sparta.

This article seeks to situate the athletic activities of Spartiates and their unmarried daughters during the Classical period in their broader societal context by using theoretical perspectives taken from sociology in general and the sociology of sport in particular to explore how those activities contributed to the maintenance of the Spartan social order by inducing compliance with behavioral norms.

The choice to focus on Spartiates and their unmarried daughters and on the Classical period is driven by the nature of the sources at our disposal. The evidence for Spartan athletics, which consists largely of literary texts and inscriptions, is distinctly imperfect. The sources tell us primarily about the activities of Spartiates and their daughters; we know very little about the athletic endeavors of *perioikoi* and helots.

Another relevant factor is that the sources come for the most part from the Classical and Roman periods; there is a dearth of evidence about Spartan athletics at other times.³ Many ancient authors who wrote about Sparta painted a picture of a community with a socio-political system that remained the same for centuries. Some modern-day scholars have taken their cue from those authors

1. All translations from Xenophon's *Lakedaimonion Politeia* are taken from Lipka 2002, in some cases with small changes to make the sense of the original Greek more obvious. All dates are BCE unless otherwise indicated. Greek words and names have been transliterated in such a way as to be as faithful as possible to original spellings while taking into account established usages for well-known individuals and places. Abbreviations are as given in the *L'année philologique* and OCD.

2. This is painfully evident from the fate of the two Spartiates who failed to die at Thermopylai (Hdt. 7.229–32, 9.71). On the treatment of *tresantes* at Sparta, see Ducat 2006a.

3. The scholiast to Theocritus 18.22 states that it was customary for females from both non-Spartiate and Spartiate families to exercise like men. The terms he uses (*Lakainai*, *Spartiatides*) probably should be taken to refer to females from perioikic and Spartiate families (respectively). See Arrighi 1985: 74–75. This source is, however, both late and exceptional.

and have combined sources from widely separated periods in order to create a composite picture of Spartan life.⁴ This approach is problematic because it is now evident that Sparta changed significantly over time, which in turn means that we cannot, for example, blithely extrapolate backwards from Roman-era inscriptions in exploring Spartan athletic practice of the fifth and fourth centuries. We must, therefore, write about the Spartan athletics of specific periods, and so we will focus our attention here on the Classical period. Whatever date one wishes to assign to the instauration of the so-called Lycurgan system, most scholars would agree that it was in place by the time of the Persian Wars and continued to operate until some point in the third century.⁵ That system, particularly the educational system that lay at its heart, played a central role in shaping athletic activity, and there is, therefore, good reason to think that there was considerable continuity in the practice of athletics at Sparta during the Classical period.⁶ A parallel examination of Spartan athletics in the Roman period is a *desideratum*, but must for the moment remain no more than that.

The goal of situating Spartan athletics in its broader societal context springs from my own belief that it is high time for historians interested in Greek athletics to move from writing sport history to writing the social history of sport. The former concentrates on sport itself, the latter on the role of sport in society. In the past 40 years enormous progress has been made in scrutinizing the extant sources with an eye toward understanding what they can tell us about Greek athletics. We have, however, arrived at a point at which further work along the same lines brings diminishing returns. Moreover, what we have learned in the past 40 years has made it possible to ask new, bigger questions about the relationship between athletics and society. A certain amount of such work has already been published,⁷ but much more remains to be done.

4. See, for example, Chrimes 1971: 85.

5. The dates proposed for the origins of the Lycurgan system by ancient and modern students of Spartan history range from the eleventh through the fifth centuries. Even if one assumes that that system took shape over the course of time, there remains a great deal of disagreement in regard to its chronology. The current consensus is that the Lycurgan *politeia* came into being in the second half of the seventh century in response to one or more crises linked to the Second Messenian War, reached a fairly complete form by the middle of the sixth century, and then remained relatively stable through the end of the fourth century. See the discussion in Cartledge 2001: 21–38 and Hodkinson 2000: 1–7. It would appear that the Spartan educational system in particular and much of the Lycurgan system in general disintegrated over the course of the third century, though here too much remains unclear. See Ducat 2006b, ix–xvii and Kennell 1995: 5–14. For a survey of Spartan history (in two parts), see Cartledge 2002 and Cartledge and Spawforth 2002.

6. Sparta was of course not a completely static society during the Classical period, and any analysis that is to any degree synchronic risks producing distortions because of the use of sources of differing dates. However, barring some exceptional cases, the history of ancient Greece must at this remove be written in a fashion that partakes of the synchronic to at least some extent. The resulting risks can be minimized through a conscious awareness of the challenges involved and careful periodization that responds to the questions being asked and the evidence at hand, but they can never be eliminated entirely.

7. See, for example, Golden 1998, Golden 2008, Miller 2000.

Exploring the relationship between athletics and society in Sparta necessarily involves wrestling with complex questions that exceed the limits of what empiricism alone can manage and hence calls for the use of at least some theory. The sources for Spartan history are less than voluminous; they are lacunose, and they are shaped by what has been called the Spartan mirage. This makes theory invaluable in suggesting ways to read those sources and to combine them into a coherent narrative. Of equal importance is the fact that the effects of athletic activities on the people who play and watch them and on the societies in which they live are sufficiently complex as to be far from transparent even to the people involved. As Foucault put it, “people know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don’t know is what what they do does.”⁸ One cannot, therefore, simply rely upon reading primary source material, because the answers to important questions about the social history of athletics are not to be found there.

The relationship between athletics and society in Sparta is too large a subject to be explored in its entirety here. We will concentrate on one particularly significant dimension of that relationship: how athletics contributed to the maintenance of the Spartan social order by inducing compliance with behavioral norms. Social order is here taken to denote a system of interlocking societal institutions, practices, and norms that is relatively stable over time.

The Spartan social order was unusually durable, and, not coincidentally, Spartans were famed for their adherence to their *nomoi*. Thucydides remarked approvingly that the Spartans, after experiencing a long period of internal conflict, had “achieved good order (*eunomia*)” and “possessed the same form of government (*politeia*) for more than four hundred years” (1.18, trans. R. Crawley, slightly modified, cf. Hdt. 1.65–66). In an exchange between Xerxes and Damaratos recounted by Herodotus, the exiled king claims that Spartans are more afraid of their *nomoi* than Xerxes’ soldiers are of their ruler (7.104). Thucydides’ chronology is open to question, and there can be no doubt that he, along with many other ancient authors, exaggerated greatly in depicting Spartan society as remaining essentially unchanged for centuries. However, it is undeniably true that the Spartan social order proved to be uncommonly stable for much of the Archaic and Classical periods. Compare, for instance, the radical political changes Athens experienced in the sixth and fifth centuries to the steady diet of oligarchy in Sparta. The historicity of the exchange between Xerxes and Damaratos is as questionable as Thucydides’ chronology of the Lycurgan *politeia*, and the ancient tradition of Spartans’ obedience to their *nomoi* is no doubt replete with imaginative embellishments. However, the very stability of the Spartan social order strongly suggests that that tradition be taken seriously. Moreover, the reproduction of any

8. Cited as a personal communication in Dreyfus, Rabinow, and Foucault 1983: 187. This parallels the differentiation Merton made between manifest and latent functions, on which see Merton 1996: 87–95.

social order depends to a considerable extent on the adherence of individuals to normative expectations, and all social orders include powerful mechanisms that induce individuals to conform to behavioral norms much of the time. We may decry those mechanisms as oppressive, but the unfortunate reality is that “societies work because they are ordered and their orders of life are maintained through their disciplinary procedures.”⁹

As we will see, athletics was a key part of the social order in Sparta in the Classical period because, among other things, it was a powerful mechanism for inducing compliance with behavioral norms on the part of both females and males. In tracing the effects of athletics we need to differentiate on the basis of sex. Athletics inculcated conformity to norms that called for females to be compliant, beautiful objects of male desire. Athletics had an equally profound effect on Spartan males because it inculcated compliance with norms that valorized subordination of the individual to the group, playing the part of the soldier, and meritocratic status competition. Athletics may well have also to some degree empowered both Spartan females and males, but its liberatory dimensions can easily be unduly amplified. There is an ever-present dialectic in athletics between its ability to reinforce norms that underpin the prevailing social order and its ability to foster individual autonomy.¹⁰ In the case of Sparta, the balance in that dialectic always inclined very much toward the former.

2. DEFINITIONS AND SOURCES

Before proceeding further, it will be helpful to settle on clear definitions of “athletics” and “sport,” both terms that can take on a wide range of meanings. The two terms are used interchangeably throughout the rest of the text, simply for the sake of variety, and are defined along the lines proposed by Allen Guttmann. He labels organized play “games,” identifies two kinds of games, noncompetitive and competitive, assigns the term “contests” to competitive games, and finds two categories of contests, intellectual and physical. Sport is defined as physical contests.¹¹ In the discussion that follows we will use Guttmann’s definition of sport, with some adaptations to make it more suitable to the situation in Sparta. Under the heading of sport we will also consider physical activities that were directly based on sport or that were undertaken in preparation for competition.

9. Fiske 1993: 77. On the Spartans’ reputation for being obedient to their *nomoi* and to their magistrates, see also Xen. *Lac.* 8.1.

10. A nuanced exploration of this dialectic can be found in Gruneau 1999.

11. Guttmann 1978: 1–14. Guttmann uses the term “sports” instead of “sport.” The latter is employed here because it avoids unnecessary confusion between the larger phenomenon of physical contests on one hand and individual activities on the other. Hence, “sport” designates physical contests and closely related activities in a general sense, and “sports” designates individual activities, such as rugby, that fall under the heading of sport. Philosophers of sport have had an extended debate over defining the term “sport.” The articles collected in Holowchak 2002: 7–98 offer a good sense of the range of definitions that have been proposed.

Sport thus includes not only activities such as contests in running or horse racing, but also throwing the discus informally and lifting weights in order to throw the discus farther in competition.

A considerable amount of attention will be devoted to choral dance as an important form of regimented physical activity. There is a spectrum, defined by the degree of regimentation involved, that extends from unorganized play to military drill, with sport, as an organized form of play, positioned somewhere in between. The more highly regimented forms of activity lying on that spectrum are frequently employed as a means of social control, as is readily apparent from the uses to which military drill is put. An exploration of the relationship between sport and social order needs to acknowledge the role played by other related forms of physical activity that are means of exerting social control. In the case of Sparta, this entails taking choral dance into account. That said, what follows in no way purports to be an exhaustive examination of either Spartan choral dance in general or of the more specific subject of the role of choral dance in creating social order in Sparta. Choral dance contributed powerfully to the maintenance of the Spartan social order in a variety of ways; the thematic content of the songs sung by choruses, for example, had the capacity to socialize performers.¹² It is impossible within the scope of this essay to engage satisfactorily with what is by any measure an expansive and complex subject, and choral dance will be treated here solely as physical activity of a particular kind that contributed to the maintenance of the Spartan social order in particular ways and that was, in that specific sense, closely related to sport.

The single most important source for athletics in Sparta in the Classical period is Xenophon. The years he spent fighting alongside Spartans and the friendships he developed with some of their leading men put him in an excellent position to write knowledgeably about Sparta. His *Lakedaimonion Politeia* provides a reasonably good sense of Spartan athletics in the first half of the fourth century and its relationship with the Spartan socio-political system.¹³ Moreover, careful study of Xenophon's work reveals him to be an unusually sensitive observer of the social effects of athletics.

Xenophon's observations on Spartan sport can be supplemented with the work of a number of authors active during the Classical period, including Critias, Aristophanes, Euripides, and Plato. Also important are inscriptions, found at Sparta and elsewhere and dating from the Classical period, that commemorate the achievements of individual Spartan athletes. There are, in addition, a small number of bronze statuettes, at least some of which were produced in Sparta, that date to the sixth and fifth centuries and that depict athletes or dancers.¹⁴

12. See the bibliography cited in n.91.

13. For an introduction to, English translation of, and commentary on Xenophon's *Lakedaimonion Politeia*, see Lipka 2002.

14. Among the thousands of lead figurines recovered in the excavations at sanctuaries in and around Sparta, there are a substantial number of depictions of musicians and komast dancers and

Literary and epigraphic sources from later periods may in some cases offer some insight, based on the likelihood that there was some degree of continuity in some aspects of Spartan athletics. The work of Plutarch is something of a special case. Plutarch's is the most comprehensive extant account of Sparta, but it combines information from sources of widely variant dates without making allowance for diachronic change and presents an idealized picture of Sparta. It is invaluable, but it must be used with a certain amount of restraint.

3. BOYS' AND MEN'S ATHLETICS IN SPARTA IN THE CLASSICAL PERIOD

A firm grasp of Spartan athletic practice, which differed in important ways from that found elsewhere in the Greek world, is an indispensable prerequisite to forming an understanding of the social role of sport.¹⁵ This and the following section thus provide relatively detailed explorations of what might be called the nuts and bolts of Spartan male and female sport; they are intended to supply requisite background information rather than comprehensive treatments of the relevant evidence.¹⁶

Spartiates' sons could not themselves become citizens unless they successfully completed a course of instruction supervised by the state (Plut. *Mor.* 238e; Xen. *Lac.* 3.3, 10.7).¹⁷ While passing through that course of instruction they

a much smaller number of depictions of what might be athletes. However, the figurines are mold-made and highly generic in appearance, and the number of lead figurine dedications in Spartan sanctuaries dropped sharply starting around 500. (See Wace 1929 as well as Boss 2000, Cavanagh and Laxton 1984, and Hodkinson 2000: 278–79.) Hence neither the lead figurines' iconography nor chronological patterns in the frequency of their dedication are particularly informative about Spartan athletics in the Classical period. Much the same can be said of Laconian ceramics. The relatively limited number of extant Laconian Black-Figure vessels with figural decoration includes a few showing athletes (Pipili 1987: 24, Powell 1998: 121–22). However, the vessels in question all date to the sixth century, a reflection of the fact that figured decoration on Laconian ceramics became significantly less common after c. 500. (Laconian ceramic workshops continued to be active after 500, but they produced primarily vases covered in black slip or with simple secondary decoration. See the comments in Hodkinson 1998: 97–101 and the bibliography cited therein.) The limited published corpus of Laconian Red-Figure, produced in the second half of the fifth and first half of the fourth century, does not seem to include any athletic scenes (McPhee 1986). Ceramics are not, therefore, an important source of information about athletics in Sparta in the Classical period.

15. Good introductions to ancient Greek athletics can be found in Kyle 2007b and Miller 2004.

16. The following discussion is based directly on Christesen 2012a. That article should be consulted for a more detailed treatment of all the material covered in sections 3 and 4. In order to avoid otiose repetition, the notes to sections 3 and 4 do not consistently cite that article. Instead, references are provided to other relevant bibliography. Where no other relevant bibliography exists, Christesen 2012a is explicitly cited.

17. The only exceptions were those males from Sparta's two royal families who were expected to become king. See Ducat 2006b: 148. Xenophon provides an overview of the Spartan educational system as it existed in his time (*Lac.* 2.1–5.9). His account is, however, by no means complete or without its difficulties. Jean Ducat has recently shown that the Spartan educational system was, in regard to the use of privately funded tutors of specific kinds and in regard to the subjects taught by those tutors, probably similar in many ways to that found in other Greek communities. It is therefore possible to make cautious use of what we know about educational practice in Athens and elsewhere

were divided into three age groups: *paides* (from about 7 to 14 years of age), *paidiskoi* (14 to 20), and *hêbôntes* (20 to 30). During their time as *paides*, boys from Spartiate families were kept busy with a range of physical activities that included both athletics and choral dance. Like their counterparts elsewhere, Spartiate boys learned athletics from *paidotribai* hired by their families. The teaching of *paidotribai* is sufficiently well known as to require no elucidation here, but instruction in dance merits some discussion.

Boys from Spartiate families received a good deal of training in choral dance from an early age. One way choruses came into being was that individual political units within the Spartan state assembled choruses that performed at religious festivals, frequently as part of formally organized dance competitions. In communities elsewhere in the Greek world choruses preparing for competition rehearsed together for anywhere from a few days to six months or more, and the same was probably true of Sparta. The dancers were supervised by at least one adult, and one chorus member was usually selected as a lead dancer. Choruses preparing for high-level competition typically had a trainer, a *didaskalos*, who in many cases was also responsible for producing original music and choreography. Choruses were also assembled for less official occasions such as weddings.¹⁸ One of the most important Spartan religious festivals, the *Gymnopaïdai*, seems to have been built around a multi-day competition of choruses that danced in the nude.¹⁹

A significant shift in a boy's existence occurred when he reached puberty and moved from the *paides* to the next age group, the *paidiskoi*. Boys' work with tutors ended at this point, and they began a tightly controlled apprenticeship that prepared them to be citizens and soldiers (Xen. *Lac.* 3.1–3). Boys continued to play sports on a regular basis, but they now did so in a more overtly competitive way and were encouraged to put their strength, aggression, and leadership qualities on display. Indeed, Paul Cartledge has argued that "Spartan education at this second stage . . . resembled nothing so much as a paramilitary assault course."²⁰

Once a boy became one of the *hêbôntes* his formal education was for the most part complete, but his involvement in sport did not diminish. Xenophon makes

to help reconstruct what happened in Sparta. On the Spartan educational system, see Cartledge 2001: 79–90, Ducat 2006b, and Kennell 1995. On the physical activities that formed part of the Spartan educational system in the Roman period, see also Cartledge 2002: 202–207. On education in ancient Greek communities other than Sparta, see Joyal, McDougall, and Yardley 2009 and Marrou 1956 (1948).

18. On choral dance in ancient Greece, the best starting places are Calame 2001 (1977) and Griffith 2001, though see also Calame 1995, Delavaud-Roux 1993, Delavaud-Roux 1994, Delavaud-Roux 1995, Lawler 1965, Naerebout 1997, and the bibliography cited therein. In addition to Calame 2001, there is an extensive body of scholarship on choral dance and poetry in Sparta that includes, but is by no means limited to, Clark 1996, Constantinidou 1998, Nagy 1990: 339–81, Peponi 2004, Peponi 2007, Tölle 1964: 48–51, and Too 1997.

19. The sources on the *Gymnopaïdai* present numerous interpretive difficulties. See Ducat 2006b: 265–74, Pettersson 1992: 42–56, Richer 2005, and Sergent 1993.

20. Cartledge 2001: 86.

it clear that adult Spartiates were expected to participate regularly in athletics. He writes that:

Once Lycurgus realized that those who keep in training develop good skin, firm flesh, and good health from their food, whereas the lazy look bloated, ugly, and weak, he did not overlook this matter either. But although he saw that anyone who trained hard of his own free will appeared to give his body sufficient exercise, he ordered that in the gymnasium the oldest man present should take care of everything, so that they never exercised less than the food they consumed required.

Lac. 5.8

When discussing the regulations of the Spartan army, Xenophon points out that all Spartiates “are ordered by law to take exercise while they are on campaign” and that they do so in the morning and evening prior to eating (*Lac.* 12.5–6). Plutarch writes that, “except when they were on campaign, all their (the Spartiates’) time was taken up by choral dances, festivals, feasts, hunting expeditions, physical exercise, and conversation” (*Lyc.* 24.4).²¹

Physical contests and trials were a major part of the Spartan educational system in the Classical period. These contests and trials may have been “survivals” of initiation rites that were held in Sparta from an early date, but most recent scholarship sees them as components of an educational system that was constructed piecemeal over the course of the Archaic period, based in part upon preexisting customs, initiation rites in particular.²² At least some of the contests and trials in which Spartan boys participated were connected to transitions from one age group to the next and took place in the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia. *Paidiskoi* who were about to become *hêbôntes* participated in a ritual in which they tried to steal cheese from an altar in the Orthia sanctuary that was defended by *hêbôntes* with whips (*Lac.* 2.9). By the Roman period this ritual had degenerated into a sanguinary spectator sport.²³

Another type of physical contest held in Sparta was a team ball game, the players in which were called *sphaireis*. Xenophon makes it clear that adult male Spartiates played this game with some regularity in the Classical period (*Lac.* 9.5). It was definitely a component of age-group transition ceremonies in Sparta in the Roman period, and the same is likely to have been true earlier (though there is no specific evidence that proves that to have been the case).

A considerable amount is known about how this game was organized and played during the Roman period, when *paidiskoi* about to become *hêbôntes* participated in an annual, multi-round tournament that included byes and that was

21. All translations from Plutarch’s *Lycurgus* are taken from R. Talbert’s *Plutarch On Sparta*.

22. Ducat 2006b: 179–222. Ducat reviews the pertinent earlier scholarship.

23. Ducat 2006b: 249–60; Kennell 1995: 71–83, 111–13, 126–29.

held in the theater located on the southwest slope of the acropolis. The players were divided into five teams built around the small groups, or *bouai*, into which boys of the same age passing through the educational system were distributed. The tournament was run by officials called *biduoi*, and a low-level magistrate (a *diabetês*) was assigned to each team and was responsible for overseeing and paying for its training. Victorious teams erected commemorative *stêlai* that listed the names of their members; the sole extant *stêlê* that includes a complete roster records a team of 14 players (*IG* 5.1.675, cf. 5.1.676).²⁴

Nigel Kennell has argued that the game played by the *sphaireis* was more or less the same as that known elsewhere in the Greek world as *episkyros* (“on the lime”) and that is described in some detail by Pollux (9.104). Eustathius states that the Spartans played a ball game called *sphairomachia* (*Commentarii ad Homeri Odysseam* Vol. 1, p. 304, ll. 18–32, at 18), and Pollux notes that *sphairomachia* was another word for *episkyros* (9.107), so it is likely that the game was known as *sphairomachia* in Sparta.

As its name indicates, *sphairomachia* was a rough-and-tumble affair. Precisely how it was played remains obscure, but Kennell is probably right in seeing it as something like a combination of rugby, volleyball, and American football.²⁵ Lucian has Solon advise Anacharsis not to laugh at the Spartans “when in their ball game in the theater they fall down on top of one another in heaps and come to blows” (*Anach.* 38, trans. H. A. Harris). It is impossible to know how much continuity there was in regard to how *sphairomachia* was played, but it is reasonable to suppose that the general nature of the game was the same in the Classical as it was in the Roman period. However, many of the organizational details no doubt changed; *biduoi* and *diabetai* are, for example, attested only in Roman-era inscriptions.

Spartan boys also participated in a rough team sport that was held on a small island in a place in Sparta called Platanistas (the plane-tree grove).²⁶ Two teams crossed bridges onto opposite sides of the island and then tried to drive each other into the water. Pausanias writes that “in fighting they strike, and kick, and bite, and gouge out each other’s eyes. Thus they fight man against man. But they also charge in serried masses, and push each other into the water” (3.14.10, trans. F. Frazer). All the sources that refer to this sport come from the Roman period (Paus. 3.14.8–10, 3.20.2; Lucian *Anach.* 38; Cic. *Tusc.* 5.27.77). However, a vague reference in Plato’s *Laws* (633b) to training in Sparta that involved “battles

24. The evidence for ball playing in ancient Greece is discussed in Crowther 2004: 351–73, Harris 1972: 75–111, and O’Sullivan 2012. On ball games in Sparta, see also Kennell 1995: 38–43, 59–63, 110–11, 131.

25. For an alternative view, see Chrimes 1971: 132–33, where the *sphaireis* are understood as boxers.

26. On the location of Platanistas, see the discussion in Sanders 2009. On the Platanistas contests more generally, see Ducat 2006b: xv, 27, 57, 208–209 and Kennell 1995: 25, 45, 55–59, 111, 138.

against each other using the hands” has been read by some scholars as a reference to what took place at Platanistas and may indicate that this sport was also played during the Classical period.²⁷

Spartiate boys and men who were talented and motivated athletes had a large number of opportunities to participate voluntarily in formally organized athletic competitions held in and around Sparta that had no direct connection to the Spartan educational system. The Karneia and the Hyakinthia, two of the most important events in the Spartan religious calendar, seem to have included athletic contests in the Classical period.²⁸ We know about other, less prominent athletic competitions held within the borders of the Spartan state primarily through dedications made by athletic victors starting in the sixth century. Those dedications frequently took the form of inscribed *stélai* that listed all of an athlete’s victories.²⁹ By far the most informative of these dedications was erected at the sanctuary of Athena Chalkioikos on the acropolis of Sparta sometime around 430 (*IG* 5.1.213). It commemorates the successes of Damonon and his son Enymakratidas in eight or nine different sets of contests held in and around Sparta.³⁰

The best Spartan athletes and horses went to Olympia, where they competed with great success from an early date. Spartan athletes were a dominating presence in the *gymnikos agôn* (track-and-field and combat sports events) at Olympia up through the early sixth century, after which time they continued to compete for centuries, but with much less success.³¹ This phenomenon has occasioned much scholarly debate, which remains unresolved.³² Spartans entered their horses in a number of different races held outside of Sparta, but do not seem to have regularly participated in the *gymnikos agôn* at contests outside of Sparta other than the Olympics.³³

4. GIRLS’ ATHLETICS IN SPARTA IN THE CLASSICAL PERIOD

In examining girls’ sport in Sparta it is important to keep in mind that the “evidence for Greek female athletics remains meagre compared to the abundant

27. Chrimes 1971: 118, Richer 2007: 238.

28. Hodkinson 1999: 153 (on the Aiglatas *stêlê*, *IG* 5.1.222), Kennell 1995: 64–66, Miller 2004: 146–49. (The identity of the Karneios mentioned in *IG* 5.1.222 remains open to debate, see Sanders 2009.) On the Hyakinthia, see Pettersson 1992: 9–41 and Richer 2004. On the Karneia, see Pettersson 1992: 57–72 and Richer 2009.

29. For a listing of all known athletic-victor inscriptions from Sparta from before the middle of the fifth century, see Whitley 1997: 647n.68 (cf. Hodkinson 1999: nn.10–24). On athletic-victor dedications of all kinds from Classical Sparta, see Hodkinson 1999: 152–56.

30. On this monument, see Hodkinson 2000: 303–307; Jeffery and Johnston 1990: 196–97, 201 #52; Moretti 1953: 36–40; and Schwartz 1976.

31. On the number and date of Spartan victors at Olympia, see Christesen 2012a. Hodkinson (Hodkinson 2000: 308) provides a list of Spartan victors in the *hippikos agôn* at Olympia.

32. See Mann 2001: 124–27 for a review of the relevant bibliography.

33. Scanlon 2002: 78–81.

and ubiquitous evidence for males.”³⁴ Further, all of the extant textual evidence was produced by non-Spartan males, so we have no way of knowing what Spartan females thought of their own physical activities.³⁵ Finally, the athletic activities of Spartan females were sufficiently unusual as to excite a great deal of comment, much of it uninformed or exaggerated. As will become evident, the relevant ancient sources are tendentious and are very far from offering a transparent window into the lives of Spartan females. It is impossible in the present context to unpack fully every cited passage, but it is necessary to keep the limitations of the sources in mind.

Unmarried Spartan girls were similar to their counterparts in other Greek communities in that they danced in choruses with some frequency, and quite dissimilar in that they regularly participated in sport.³⁶ As Manfred Lämmer has pointed out, “Sparta. . . seems to have been the only place in ancient Greece where an ascertainable and notable attempt was made to introduce physical exercises for women.”³⁷ In most ancient Greek communities during the Classical period opportunities for females to play sports were limited to initiation rites in which they took part at most a few times before marriage.³⁸ One of the basic points Xenophon seeks to establish in his *Lakedaimonion Politeia* is that Spartan customs were fundamentally different from those of other Greek communities. The first piece of evidence he produces to make his case is the treatment of females. He states that females in Sparta, instead of being expected to sit quietly and weave clothes, are required to exercise regularly:

Lycurgus believed that. . .the most important task for freeborn women was to bear children. First, therefore, he ordered that the female sex should exercise their bodies no less than the male. Second, he established contests in running and strength for women just as for men, thinking that the offspring of two strong partners would also be more vigorous.

Lac. 1.4

34. Kyle 2007a: 132.

35. Stewart 1997: 108–18 argues that extant bronze handles for mirrors and attachments from ritual vessels, which depict female athletes and dancers and at least some of which seem to have been produced in Sparta (see below), reflect the self-conception of Spartan females.

36. For girls’ choral dance in Sparta Calame 2001 (1977) is essential, though see also Dillon 2002: 211–15, Griffith 2001, Ingalls 2000, and Larson 1995: 64–69. For general discussions of female athletics in Sparta, see Arrigoni 1985 and Pomeroy 2002.

37. Lämmer 1981: 21.

38. There was some change in this regard by the first century CE, by which time girls were competing at a range of contests, including the Pythian and Isthmian games (see, for example, *SIG*³ 802, which dates to 47 CE). This change was apparent in Sparta, where a set of games founded in honor of Livia in the first century CE included contests for girls (Cartledge 2002: 102–103, 205–206). An inscription dating to the Roman period (*SEG* 11.830) commemorates a victory by a female in the *dioulos* at these games (cf. the scholiast to Juvenal 4.53 on a wrestling match between a Spartan *virgo* and the Roman *delator* Palfurius Sura during the reign of Nero, probably in connection with the Neronia games at Rome). On female athletics in the Roman period, see Lee 1984, Lee

Three slightly earlier sources also touch on the participation of Spartan females in athletics. One of the fragments of the *Lakedaimonion Politeiai* authored by Critias mentions Spartan females exercising in order to produce stronger children (F32). Euripides' *Andromache* includes an exchange in which Peleus attributes Helen's willingness to run off to Troy with Paris to the way in which Spartan females were raised:

They leave their houses in the company of young men, with bare thighs and loosened tunics, and in a fashion I cannot stand they share the same running-tracks [*dromoi*] and wrestling places [*palaistra*] with them. After that is it any wonder that you do not bring up women to be chaste?
Eur. *Andr.* 597–601, trans. D. Kovacs

Aristophanes made the physical training of Spartan females into a subject of comedy in *Lysistrata*. When Lysistrata first encounters her Spartan counterpart, Lampito, she remarks on her physical fitness (“your body looks . . . strong enough to choke a bull”), and Lampito replies that she exercises and dances regularly (ll. 76–82).³⁹

There is no lack of ideological cant in these sources, but collectively they leave little doubt that females from Spartiate families were expected to participate in athletics. This seems to have included both exercise and competition since Xenophon clearly states that Lycurgus required Spartan females to train their bodies (*sômaskein*) and that he set up competitions (*agônes*) in running and strength (cf. Plut. *Ages.* 21.3). The earliest and best sources, Euripides and Xenophon, indicate that the athletic activities of Spartan females consisted largely of running and wrestling (cf. Pl. *Leg.* 833c–4d, Theoc. 18.22–25, Cic. *Tusc.* 2.15.36, Lucian *Judgment of the Goddesses* 14, Paus. 3.13.7, Philostr. *Gymnastikos* 27, and Hesychius [s.v. *Driônas*]). Roman-era texts also make mention of throwing the discus and javelin, *pankration*, and boxing (Plut. *Lyc.* 14.2, *Mor.* 227d; Prop. 3.14.1–10).

It would appear that Spartan females stopped playing sports after they married.⁴⁰ The relevant evidence, which is more ambiguous than one might expect, includes descriptions of Spartan female athletics in the ancient sources, the vocabulary used in those sources, the kind of sports played by Spartan females, the social contexts in which they played sports, and how they dressed for sport. The termination of Spartan girls' participation in athletics upon marriage represented a significant limitation. Spartan girls married later than was the case in most other

1988, and Mantas 1995. The broader participation of females in athletic contests seems to have been a short-lived phenomenon. On athletic contests associated with initiation rites, see Scanlon 2002: 64–198.

39. On the portrayal of Sparta in these authors' work, see, respectively, Tigerstedt 1965–1978, vol. 1: 156–58, Poole 1994, Harvey 1994.

40. Christesen 2012a.

Greek communities (at age 18–20 instead of 13–14), but nonetheless their time as athletes was sharply circumscribed.⁴¹

Spartan girls played sports in a variety of contexts. There are some indications that Spartan girls were expected to go through a state-supervised educational system organized roughly along the same lines as the one for boys, and such a system, based on what we know about boys' activities, may well have included playing sports.⁴² There was also an overt ritual component in some of the athletic activities of Spartan girls. It has been argued that Alcman F1 ll. 39–63 and F3 l.8 refer to footraces between girls, but the interpretation of both passages is debated.⁴³ Pausanias (3.13.7) and Hesychius (s.v. *Dionysiades*) mention a race run by the Dionysiades, eleven females (of unspecified age) who served the cult of Dionysus Kolatas. Theocritus describes a group of 240 *korai* running races that were in some way connected to the worship of Helen (18.22–25). A race mentioned in a gloss of Hesychius (s.v. *en Driônas*) may have been connected in some way to the races dedicated to Helen that are mentioned by Theocritus or may have been dedicated to local deities, the Driôdones, known through another Hesychian gloss (s.v. *Driôdones*). There is no direct evidence that any of these races were held before the Roman era, but some or all of them may well have existed already in the Classical period. All three races seem to have had strong initiatory overtones.⁴⁴ Most of the competitions in which girls took part must have been in Sparta itself, but Sarah Pomeroy has argued that the majority of participants in the Heraia at Olympia were Spartans.⁴⁵ This is possible but little more than a conjecture since there is no direct evidence for Spartan girls taking part in those games.

Spartan girls were famed for wearing very little when they danced in choruses or played sports. Ibycus called Spartan females “thigh-flashers” (F58 Page), and we have already seen a character in one of Euripides' plays complaining that Spartan girls leave their homes “with bare thighs and loosened tunics” on their way to run and wrestle. A particularly murky passage in the *Dissoi Logoi*, a

41. On the age of Spartan females at marriage, see Cartledge 2001: 116. It is not impossible that females who were married but who had not yet borne children continued to participate in sport. However, as was the case elsewhere in Greece, marriage seems to have brought with it a fundamental change in the lifestyle of Spartan females (see, for example, Plut. *Lyc.* 15.3 on the cutting of brides' hair). In addition, there seems to be no evidence that “married but not a mother” was a recognized status at Sparta.

42. Ducat 2006b: 223–47.

43. See the discussion in Calame 1977, vol. 2: 67–72.

44. Calame 2001 (1977): 185–91, Ducat 2006b: 231–33, Scanlon 2002: 133–36. Arrigoni has argued that there was a major divergence between the race for Helen and the race of the Dionysiades in regard to the number of participants because the former was open to girls from both Spartiate and perioikic families and was part of a pre-nuptial rite, whereas the latter was open only to females from elite Spartiate families and was part of a process of selecting priestesses for Dionysus (Arrigoni 1985: 70–84).

45. Pomeroy 2002: 26, cf. Scanlon 2002: 115. On the Heraia, see Scanlon 2002: 98–120 and Scanlon 2008 (though see also the skeptical comments in Kyle 2007b: 220–21 and Langenfeld 2006).

philosophical treatise by an unknown author that probably dates to around 400,⁴⁶ seems to say that Spartan girls while exercising did not wear their normal clothing, which covered their shoulders and arms (90.2.9 DK, cf. Soph. F872, Aelius Dionysius s.v. *doriazein*, Poll. 2.187 and 7.55, Clem. Al. *Paid.* 2.10.114.1).⁴⁷

We are fortunate in this case to have material evidence that supplements the literary sources, in the form of roughly forty bronze statuettes, many of which served as handles for mirrors or attachments to ritual vessels. At least some of these pieces seem to have been produced in or around Sparta in the sixth and fifth centuries.⁴⁸ All of these pieces show young women who probably represent dancers or athletes. Some of the figures carry items associated with dance (flutes and cymbals) or sport (aryballoi, sickles, and strigils). More than half of the figures are completely nude (see Figure 1), but some wear shorts or a short tunic. These bronzes are highly anomalous in that nude females were rarely depicted in Greek art before the fourth century, and they resist simple interpretation.⁴⁹

It is possible that on at least some occasions Spartan females played sports in the nude, as was customary for Spartan males. Both Critias and Aristophanes in describing the athletic endeavors of Spartan girls use the verb *gymnazô*, which denoted informal nude athletic activity that took place on a regular basis in gymnasia.⁵⁰ However, since this verb was coined to describe an activity that was the vast majority of the time restricted to males, it is far from clear that its usual connotations of nudity can tell us anything significant about the dress habits of Spartan girls.⁵¹ The female Guardians in Plato's *Republic* exercise in the nude (457a). Theocritus refers to Spartan female athletes coated in oil (18.23), which was typically associated with athletic nudity. Immediately after discussing the athletic habits of unmarried Spartan girls, Plutarch states that Lycurgus made special forms of dress, including nudity, customary for them when they participated in processions (*Lyc.* 14.2–4). However, Plutarch describes only the dress of Spartan girls in processions, not while playing sports. Propertius (3.14.1–4) and Ovid (*Her.* 16.149–52) explicitly mention Spartan females exercising in the nude (cf. Lucian *Judgment of the Goddesses* 14), but the evidentiary value of

46. Robinson 1979: 34–41.

47. Athenaeus' claim (566e) that Spartan *parthenoi* were stripped in front of visiting foreigners is implausible at best.

48. Scanlon 2002: 127–37, Stewart 1997: 108–18.

49. It is worth noting that a sixth-century Laconian Black-Figure kylix shows three nude girls by a river (Stibbe 1972: #209).

50. Christesen 2002.

51. Both the scholiast to Theocritus 18.22 and Nicolaus of Damascus (*FGrH* 90 F103 Z144.4) refer to the exercises undertaken by Spartan females as *gymnasia*, but here again it is unclear if the strong connotations of nudity present in the normal usages of the word are relevant to our understanding of Spartan girls' dressing habits. It is interesting that Xenophon used the verb *sômaskein* in his description of the athletic activities of Spartan females (*Lac.* 1.4). This verb denotes physical training without carrying any indication of the clothing, or lack thereof, worn while exercising. Xenophon's choice of *sômaskein* rather than *gymnazô* may reflect a sensitivity to Spartan females' habits of dress developed from first-hand experience.

their work is diminished by their late date and poetic nature. Moreover, given that the musings of non-Spartan authors on Spartan females often ran to the prurient, there is good reason to expect distortion and exaggeration about the degree to which Spartan girls exposed themselves while exercising.

The most likely interpretation is that Spartan girls usually exercised wearing short tunics, as indicated by the earliest relevant sources, Ibycus and Euripides. This outfit is shown on some of the bronzes discussed above (see Figure 2). On some special occasions Spartan girls participating in athletics may well have gone completely nude, particularly in contests associated with initiation rites. The dress of Spartan female athletes may also have been dependent on their age; Plato's *Laws* includes recommendations for a set of athletic contests for girls in which competitors up to age 13 are nude, whereas their older counterparts are "modestly dressed" (833d).

The one athletic activity in which married Spartan women were permitted to take part, albeit indirectly, was horse racing. The first female victor at Olympia was in fact a Spartan, Kyniska, who won the four-horse chariot race in 396 and 392.⁵² Kyniska set an example that was later followed by other Spartan women, including Euryleonis, who won an Olympic victory in the two-horse chariot race in the second quarter of the fourth century (Paus. 3.8.1, 3.17.6).⁵³ There is no evidence that either Kyniska or Euryleonis was ever married, but we know little about individual Spartan females, and it seems improbable that none of the Spartan females who owned race horses were married.

5. ATHLETICS AND SOCIAL ORDER IN SPARTA IN THE CLASSICAL PERIOD: METHODOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION

Sport played a major role in the life of male Spartiates of all ages and of unmarried girls from Spartiate families. One might well suspect, therefore, that it had not insignificant effects on many Spartans and hence on Spartan society as a whole. In the interests of (relative) brevity, we will concentrate on a specific, particularly important facet of the relationship between sport and society: how sport contributed to the stability of the social order in Sparta during the Classical period. To reiterate a point made above, social order consists of a system of interlocking societal institutions, practices, and norms that is relatively stable over time.

52. On Kyniska and her Olympic triumphs, see Hodkinson 2000: 303–33, Kyle 2003, Millender 2009: 18–26, and Pomeroy 2002: 19–24. The dates of Kyniska's Olympic victories are not absolutely certain, but are likely correct as given. At least some Spartan women rode horses and drove horse-drawn carts, but there is no direct evidence for their personal participation in equestrian competitions. The relevant evidence is collected in Pomeroy 2002: 19–24.

53. Pausanias states that "after Kyniska other women, chiefly Lacedaimonian, have won Olympic victories" (3.8.1, trans. J. Frazer), but mentions only one, Euryleonis, by name (3.17.6).

There are myriad ways to approach the study of social order; one approach that has been particularly fruitful is to focus on how institutions, practices, and norms coerce and socialize individuals and generate consensus among them and in so doing constrain and shape their behavior in ways that are conducive to the maintenance of social order. Coercion can range from the brutal to the subtle. It can take the form of pressure, threats, intimidation, or outright force, or it can be a gradual indoctrination in the habit of obeying authority figures and adhering to norms. Teaching children social norms virtually from birth, i.e., socialization, goes a long way toward making those norms second nature to the point where people adhere to them literally without thinking about it. Consensus occurs when the members of a society come to broad agreement about norms they will voluntarily obey and are rewarded for adherence to them.⁵⁴

It is important to be clear from the outset about the assumptions inherent in and the limitations of this analytical approach, which might be best described as weak functionalism. Weak functionalism assumes that societies are to some extent coherent systems and that many—though by no means all—institutions, practices, and norms play a significant role in constraining and shaping the behavior of individuals in such a way as to help maintain social order. This approach needs to be sharply differentiated from strong functionalism, which takes societies to be homeostatic systems in which all institutions, practices, and norms contribute meaningfully to social reproduction and in which internal

54. An excellent brief introduction to past and current thinking about the bases of social order can be found in Cohen 1968: 18–33. For a more up-to-date and scholarly work on the same subject, see Wrong 1994. For a collection of important pieces of scholarship on social order, see Hechter and Horne 2009. The summary given here represents a modified version of the three standard schools of thought on social order, which are typically called coercion theory (associated with Hobbes), value-consensus theory (associated with Durkheim and Parsons), and interest theory (associated with Locke and von Hayek). Coercion theory holds that societal order comes into being when people surrender some of their freedom to a state that they invest with coercive powers. Value-consensus theory holds that societal order exists primarily because people share norms and ways of thinking about the world. There are two variants of interest theory. One holds that order results from a consciously-made “contract” between people who find it in their best interests to make certain binding social arrangements with each other. The other holds that order is an unintended consequence of people separately pursuing their own interests. The basic ideas of value-consensus theory are here put under the heading of socialization because this is the single most important means of transmitting and inculcating shared norms and ways of thinking about the world. The basic ideas of interest theory are here put under consensus because, whether people intentionally or unintentionally create social order in pursuing their interests, that order can only be sustained if they coordinate their actions and cooperate. That, in turn, requires that they implicitly or explicitly agree to adhere voluntarily to some set of norms, or, put another way, that they reach consensus. As von Hayek noted, societal order rests on individuals’ “propensity to obey certain rules of conduct in which the order of action of the group as a whole rests,” and “in any group of men of more than the smallest size, collaboration will always rest both on spontaneous order as well as on deliberate organization” (quoted in Hechter and Horne 2009: 147 and 149, respectively). Socialization, consensus, and coercion shade off into each other, and the dividing line between one and the next is not always clear. They are, however, different enough to merit separate consideration.

conflict is virtually non-existent because of near perfect integration of individuals into the social system and a concomitantly high level of consensus about normative values. Strong functionalism, particularly as it took shape in the work of Talcott Parsons, has long been discredited, for a variety of reasons, including its failure to give due weight to conflict and to individual agency and its inability to account for change.⁵⁵

The difference between weak and strong functionalism needs to be underlined because the reading of Spartan sport proposed here concentrates on how it underpinned the social order in Sparta. It is impossible in the space of this essay to explore the entirety of the relationship between sport and society in Sparta, and that might be mistaken as an implicit endorsement of something resembling strong functionalism. It is, therefore, worth stating explicitly that sport was by no means the only factor supporting social order in Sparta, that sport fostered social order as much or more by imposing coercion as by building consensus, that sport always had the potential to become a site of resistance to pressures to conform to norms that subserved the social order, that sport generated tensions that engendered conflict, that there was endemic conflict of various kinds in Spartan society, and that to the extent that Spartan society can be considered as a system, it was a system that was always marked by a high level of internal contradiction and dysfunction. Moreover, the long-term maintenance of a stable social order in Sparta was by no means an unmitigated good. The Spartan social order can only be described as repressive, and even if one subscribes to the view that exploitation and inequalities in the distribution of power are inherent features of human societies, it is probably fair to say that Sparta was notable for the degree to which these features were manifested.

Nonetheless, it remains indubitably true that an interest in social order requires no special defense. As Kingsley Davis observed, “If societies exist, there must be some sense in which each one more or less hangs together, and the question of how this is accomplished and not accomplished is a central one.”⁵⁶

In thinking about the social effects of sport, it will also be helpful to conceive of sport as a ritualized activity. Use of the term “ritualized activity” typically carries the assumption that almost any activity can potentially take on the qualities of a ritual to a greater or lesser extent. A wide range of activities has been characterized as ritualized, and numerous attempts have been made to find commonalities shared by all ritualized activities. Most theorists in recent decades have looked to the work of Victor Turner, Stanley Tambiah, and others in seeing a performative dimension as being an essential component of any activity that

55. The extent to which societies can be understood as well-organized systems has been the subject of vigorous debate among sociologists. A good discussion can be found in Ritzer 2008: 186–222. For a concise discussion of strong functionalism and its flaws, see Holmwood 2005. For a general discussion of the application of the different varieties of functionalism to the study of sport, see chapter 3 of Christesen 2012b.

56. Davis 1959: 764.

can be reasonably identified as being ritualized. Perhaps the most productive approach to establishing suitable parameters for separating ritualized from non-ritualized activities is that outlined by Catherine Bell. She takes a performative element as a necessary but not sufficient condition and argues that ritualized activities are distinguished not so much by their content as by being contrasted with more mundane actions and by being framed as different and special ways of acting.⁵⁷

It requires no great intuitive leap to see that sport can easily become a ritualized activity. Sport is inherently performative and is framed as being set apart and different. Johan Huizinga, in his famous *Homo Ludens*, characterized sport as a form of play and defined play as a “free activity standing quite consciously outside ‘ordinary’ life.”⁵⁸ Huizinga pointed out that play is distinguished from everyday life by being autotelic and being frequently carried out in spaces that are temporally and spatially apart. This “set-apart” quality of play is heightened in the case of sport, especially in regard to formally organized competitions. Bernard Suits, who has written extensively on the philosophy of sport, remarked that:

To play a game is to engage in activity directed towards bringing about a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by rules, where the rules prohibit the more efficient in favour of less efficient means, and where such rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity.⁵⁹

In this sense, sport, a subcategory of games, is by definition overtly peculiar since it entails adhering to rules that establish arbitrary ends (e.g., drop your opponent to the ground three times to win a wrestling match) that must be achieved by specific, unnecessarily complex means (e.g., do not use an edged weapon to incapacitate your opponent). If other considerations, such as the provision of special playing fields and uniforms (or, in this case, nudity), are taken into account, the identification of sport as a potentially ritualized activity becomes almost an inevitability.⁶⁰

57. Bell 1992: 37–168 and *passim*.

58. Huizinga 1950 (1938): 13.

59. Suits 1978: 34.

60. There is a considerable body of scholarly literature that approaches sport as a ritualized activity or a secular ritual. See, for instance, MacAloon 1984 on the modern Olympic games. On secular rituals, see Moore and Myerhoff 1977. Despite numerous similarities between sport and ritual, sport is typically not considered to be ritual in the technical sense of the term (for a widely accepted definition of that slippery term, see Tambiah 1985: 128), primarily because the outcome of an athletic competition is not, like a ritual, predetermined. This point was most notably made in Lévi-Strauss 1966: 30–33, but see also Gluckman and Gluckman 1977.

6. FEMALE ATHLETICS AND SOCIAL ORDER IN SPARTA IN THE CLASSICAL PERIOD

Spartan females have since antiquity had a reputation for possessing significantly more power and freedom than their counterparts in other Greek communities. Herodotus, for example, describes a prepubescent Gorgo intervening to prevent her father King Kleomenes from succumbing to the temptations of a bribe offered by the Milesian tyrant Aristagoras (5.51, cf. Plut. *Mor.* 240d). Aristotle claimed that Spartan women enjoyed freedom that ostensibly had detrimental results for the community as a whole (*Pol.* 1269b15–70a10). And we have already seen Euripides' Peleus complaining about the sexual license of females in Sparta. This same basic picture of Spartan women has continued to be espoused up through the present. To give but one instance, Simone de Beauvoir wrote that in Sparta women “underwent the burdens of maternity as men did war: but except for this civic duty, no restraints were put on their freedom.”⁶¹

There is, however, good reason to think that this picture of a Sparta inhabited by liberated and empowered females is fundamentally flawed. Ellen Millender has cogently argued that the received understanding of Spartan women is the product of twin processes of idealization and vilification and cannot be accepted at face value. More specifically, she has made the case that the liberated and empowered Spartan woman was a construct that emerged in fifth-century Athens:

Authors of this period repeatedly defined and reaffirmed Athenian norms of monogamous marriage and patriarchal authority through treatments of Sparta as a society in which both of these configurations were replaced by their inversions—female promiscuity and gynecocracy.⁶²

Millender acknowledges that Spartan women did in fact enjoy certain *de iure* and *de facto* privileges not shared by Athenian women, most notably in regard to the ownership of property. At the same time, the lives led by Spartan women were very different from those imagined by non-Spartan authors. “Similar to most other Greek women, they entered marriage under the direction of their fathers or closest male relatives and devoted their lives to procreation and the supervision of their households” with the clear expectation of “male dominance in conjugal relationships.” This view is echoed in Paul Cartledge’s observation that “the primary emphasis in the upbringing of [Spartan] girls was on preparing them for their future subordinate roles as wives and mothers of warriors.”⁶³

The unusual extent to which they participated in sport has been a fundamental part of the image of Spartan females since antiquity. Ancient authors tended to see

61. Beauvoir 2010 (1949): 96; cf. Pomeroy 2002: 70–71 and *passim*.

62. Millender 1999: 356.

63. Millender 1999: 373, Cartledge 2001: 115, respectively. These two works explore the evidence for and realities of the lives of Spartan women. See also Millender 2012. One must also bear in mind that the status of women in Sparta remains a subject of ongoing scholarly debate.

the athletic activities of Spartan females as having eugenic purposes (Critias F32, Xen. *Lac.* 1.4, Plut. *Lyc.* 14.2). This was to some extent likely grounded in fact; the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists currently recommends exercise for pregnant women because “exercise during pregnancy. . . may improve your ability to cope with labor.” This is, however, not quite the same as the claim made in the ancient sources that fit women gave birth to stronger children.⁶⁴

Many modern scholars have taken a different approach, probably because the connection between the rising status of women in the Western world and the sharp increase in female participation in athletics in the past 40 years has produced a readiness to seek the same connection in ancient Sparta.⁶⁵ Instead of being a matter of eugenics, the athletic activities of Spartan females are now sometimes seen as reflecting and reinforcing the unusual powers and freedoms they (at least ostensibly) enjoyed. For example, Barton Kunstler has argued that “gymnastics training. . . fostered the pride, tradition, and sexual solidarity which supported women’s strong presence in the city.”⁶⁶

The argument that regular participation in athletics nurtured a sense of self-confidence among Spartan girls is not without its merits. Here again we encounter the limitations of the sources. Nonetheless, it does seem to be the case in many if not all times and places that regular physical activity can be a means of fostering empowerment. This is eloquently expressed in a passage from a memoir published in 1983, in which Caryl Rivers, reminiscing about playing basketball in high school, writes that “to play basketball in the ‘50s was to step out of woman’s inherited role, to cast off docility for ferocity, to control, if not your destiny, at least the arc of one particular piece of cowhide for a slice of eternity If you have played basketball—really played it with pride and passion—you can never really be docile again.”⁶⁷

Sport can generate a sense of empowerment because it provides an opportunity for individuals to exert, in a very direct fashion, power over other individuals. One of the most basic ways of thinking about power is to understand it as “the probability that one actor in a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his will despite resistance.”⁶⁸ Playing sports, particularly the competitions in running and wrestling in which Spartan girls seem to have engaged, provided the opportunity for individual Spartan girls to impose their will on their opponents

64. For the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists guidelines for exercise for pregnant women, see <http://www.acog.org/~media/For%20Patients/faq119.pdf?dmc=1&ts=20120822T1202586172>. Plutarch adds that fit women were also better able to endure the strains of childbirth. Xenophon implies that Spartan females enjoyed a better diet than that typical of women elsewhere in the Greek world and that this was related to their habit of taking regular exercise (*Lac.* 1.3).

65. As Donald Kyle has noted, in our explorations of ancient Greek sport “we are still eager to find strong, competitive females” (Kyle 2007a: 145).

66. Kunstler 1987: 37. Cf. Cantarella 1987: 42–43 and Scanlon 2002: 136.

67. Rivers 1983: 311.

68. Weber 1947: 152.

in the face of resistance and in so doing to exercise power.⁶⁹ Opportunities for Spartan girls to exercise power in such an immediate and overt fashion were not otherwise plentiful, and it is not a mere play on words to say that exercising power can engender a sense of empowerment.

It is likely significant in this regard that the athletic activity of Spartan girls included a contact sport in the form of wrestling. Modern research has shown that females who play contact sports such as rugby consistently express the conviction that their athletic activity has empowered them. Participation in a contact sport brings with it an expectation of physical aggressiveness and assertiveness that is empowering both because it is at odds with behavior that is normative for females in other contexts and because it offers the opportunity to impose one's will on someone else in the most tangible fashion imaginable. As Laura Chase, the author of a study on women's rugby put it, "Many of these women recognized that by playing rugby they were. . . using their bodies in ways that disturb the boundaries of what is appropriate for women." Chase also noted that "a number of. . . athletes specifically addressed the ways in which tackling in rugby is a powerful act or makes them feel powerful." Chase quotes one of the athletes she interviewed as stating that, "I am my body, and I am controlling it and what it does. I feel powerful, and strong. Even if it is a bad tackle I still feel strong if they go down. I feel larger than I am."⁷⁰

Moreover, many female athletes playing contact sports find that a sense of empowerment generated on the field carries over into everyday life. A female rugby player interviewed in the course of a different study, when asked about whether she felt her athletic experiences had empowered her, replied, "It taught me that I am powerful enough to say no and mean it, and I can make someone listen if I have to." Another athlete, in answering the same question, stated that, "[Confidence from rugby] carries off the field. Well I'm like, I play rugby, I'm a badass. . . . Rugby has reminded me how strong a person I can be regardless of the fact that I'm a woman, my size."⁷¹

However, both of these understandings of Spartan female athletics, while not necessarily untrue, miss the heart of the matter. Sport may have helped physically prepare Spartan girls to give birth and may have fostered a certain sense of empowerment, but the effects of sport on Spartan girls were much more profound—and, from a modern feminist perspective—much more sinister. Sport reinforced patriarchal social norms that called for females to be compliant, beautiful objects of male desire.

The adherence of Spartan females to social norms was reinforced by sport in part because it subtly coerced them into a habit of compliance. In the past thirty years, thanks in no small measure to the work of Foucault and Bourdieu, we have

69. On athletic competition as a matter of exercising power, see Shogan 1999: 11, 36.

70. Chase 2006: 241 and 238, respectively; cf. Blinde, Taub, and Han 1993.

71. Vance 2012: 6.

become more aware of the extent to which societies are held together by subtle forms of coercion. Foucault called this type of coercion “discipline” and labeled its operation as the “micro-physics of power.” He described individuals who have been taught discipline as “the obedient subject, the individual subjected to habits, rules, orders, an authority that is continually exercised around him and upon him, and which he must allow to function automatically in him.”⁷²

Foucault identified three components in a disciplinary system: systemic arrangements that create docile bodies, means of correct training, and panopticism. He argued that docile bodies are created by careful distribution of individuals in controlled spaces (e.g., barracks, factories), careful organization of individual actions through the imposition of strict timetables (control of activity), the seriation of activities so that each ends with an examination and possible correction (the organization of geneses), and the efficient combination of individuals into larger wholes (composition of forces). Correct training is carried out by means of hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and examination, all of which are facilitated by placing individuals in an environment in which surveillance is always possible and which thus induces self-policing.⁷³

Bourdieu worked along the same lines as Foucault, but broke new ground by paying heed to the specifically physical dimensions of discipline. Foucault, it is true, placed a great deal of emphasis on the body.⁷⁴ However, it is easy to exaggerate the extent to which Foucault’s concept of the body was corporeal. Though his usage of the term varied considerably, in many cases what Foucault called the body was a substitute for the self-reflexive individual. Foucault was resolutely opposed to the idea that there was such a thing as an autonomous and transcendent human subject on which society acted; he instead saw individual consciousness as a relatively recent illusion that resulted from a particular set of discursive formations. Hence his comment that “Man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.”⁷⁵ He could not, however, avoid discussing individuals as such, and treating individual human beings as bodies was an effective means of implicitly rejecting humanism. This is evident in his frequent use of the term “social body” (*le corps social*) to refer to society as a whole. Foucault in fact tended to see discipline as something that was imposed on the body through the intermediary of the mind and for the most part took the body as a passive entity that received but did not initiate actions.⁷⁶

Bourdieu, on the other hand, took the position that discipline could be inculcated by means of bodily training and that the disciplined body as a corporeal

72. Foucault 1977 (1975): 128–29.

73. Foucault 1977 (1975): 135–230.

74. See, for instance, Foucault 1977 (1975): 25.

75. Foucault 1994 (1966): 387. On Foucault’s anti-humanism, see Gutting 2011: 32–38, 69–73 and Paden 1987. On his substitution of the body for the self-reflexive individual, see Markula and Pringle 2006: 40–41.

76. See the discussion in Lash 1991 and McNay 1999.

entity could in and of itself shape individual behavior. He also argued that such training had far-reaching effects precisely because its physical nature made it resistant to conscious examination:

If all societies and, significantly, all the “totalitarian institutions” in Goffman’s phrase, that seek to produce a new man through a process of “deculturation” and “reculturation” set such store on the seemingly most insignificant details of *dress, bearing, physical and verbal manners*, the reason is that, treating the body as a memory, they entrust to it in abbreviated and practical, i.e. mnemonic, form the fundamental principles of the arbitrary content of the culture. The principles embodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit; nothing seems more ineffable, more incommunicable, more inimitable, and, therefore, more precious, than the values given body, *made* body by the transubstantiation achieved by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy, capable of instilling a whole cosmology, an ethic, a metaphysic, a political philosophy, through injunctions as insignificant as “stand up straight” or “don’t hold your knife in your left hand.” . . . The whole trick of pedagogic reason lies precisely in the way it extorts the essential while seeming to demand the insignificant.⁷⁷

Unlike Foucault, who evinced no direct interest in the subject, Bourdieu wrote at some length on sport.⁷⁸ He made the case that:

If most organizations—the Church, the army, political parties, industrial firms, etc.—put such a great emphasis on bodily disciplines, it is because obedience consists in large part in belief, and belief is what the body . . . concedes even when the mind . . . says no. . . . It is perhaps by considering what is most specific in sport, that is, the . . . manipulation of the body, and the fact that sport—as all disciplines in all total or totalitarian institutions, such as convents, prisons, asylums, political parties, etc.—is a way of obtaining from the body a form of consent that the mind could refuse, that one will best manage to understand the use that most authoritarian regimes make of sports. Bodily discipline is the instrument par excellence of all forms of “domestication.”⁷⁹

Perhaps the most obvious example of the effects of disciplined bodily training is military drill. Drill continues to be a staple activity for training soldiers because it is highly effective in creating a disciplined habit of instant obedience. The United States Army issues a 277-page long field manual on drill and ceremonies, which includes the following observations:

77. Bourdieu 1977 (1972): 94–95.

78. Foucault’s ideas have, however, been widely applied by sociologists of sport. The methodologies for doing so are discussed at length in Markula and Pringle 2006.

79. Bourdieu 1988: 160 and 161, respectively.

Once the elements of discipline have been instilled through drill on the parade square, it develops, naturally, into various forms of crew drill, gun drill, and battle drill but the aim of discipline remains unchanged. This aim is the conquest of fear. Drill helps to achieve this because when it is carried out men tend to lose their individuality and are unified into a group under obedience to orders. If men are to give their best in war they must be united. Discipline seeks through drill to instill into all ranks this sense of unity, by requiring them to obey orders as one man.⁸⁰

The essence of drill is synchronized, highly regimented movement by the members of a group in response to verbal commands. The United States Army field manual on drill includes the following guidelines for trainees:

On the command . . . of *Forward*, **MARCH**, step forward 30 inches with the left foot. The head, eyes, and body remain as in the *Position of Attention*. The arms swing in natural motion, without exaggeration and without bending the elbows, about 9 inches straight to the front and 6 inches straight to the rear of the trouser seams. The fingers and thumbs are curled as in the *Position of Attention*, just barely clearing the trousers.⁸¹

Males from Spartiate families spent a good deal of time engaged in military drill and hence in a disciplinary environment that required synchronized, highly regimented movement. Although females from Spartiate families did not participate in such training, they did spend a good deal of their time in a similar environment because they regularly took part in choral dance.

The process of training for and then carrying out a choral performance entailed all four of Foucault's systematic arrangements for creating docile bodies. Girls were distributed in the tightly controlled physical space of the chorus, their activities were carefully organized, their mastery of music and choreography required seriated learning, and their efficient combination into a larger whole was the goal toward which they aimed. All of this was carried out under the watchful eyes of the *didaskalos* and the chorus leader, who exercised hierarchical observation and normalizing judgment. Choral dance was an intensely hierarchical experience that had clearly defined leadership positions and the expectation of prompt and unquestioned obedience to commands. Demosthenes emphasizes the importance of the chorus leader (21.6), and Xenophon describes sailors struck into obedience by fear of a storm as waiting in silence for commands "just like choral dancers" (*Mem.* 3.5.6). In Alcman's *Louvre partheneion*, the chorus sings that Hagesichora leads them like a trace-horse guides a team of chariot horses or a helmsman steers a ship and that they must obey her (ll. 93–95).⁸² The fact that *didaskaloi* for both male and female choruses were almost invariably male means

80. Department of the Army 2003: Section 10.1.

81. Department of the Army 2003: Section 2.2.

82. The metaphor of chorus-leader as helmsman had a long life in Greek literature. Cf. Aelius Aristides 2.191–92 L-B.

that hierarchical gender relations were replicated even in a female chorus with a female lead dancer. The environments of both training and performance made examination and surveillance inevitable.

The outfits that Spartan girls wore while dancing and playing sports heightened their exposure to the gaze of others and reinforced the elements of examination and surveillance in these activities. The coercive effects of exposure to the gaze of others will be discussed in more detail below with respect to male athletic nudity. For the moment it is enough to remark that in most Greek communities females were typically largely shielded from view, primarily by means of intentionally modest clothing but in some cases also by means of domestic seclusion. Girls from Spartiate families, on the other hand, were intentionally exposed. The degree to which they did or did not adhere to normative ideals of appearance and behavior was thus made apparent, which greatly increased the pressures to conform to those ideals.⁸³

It would be possible to extend this analysis of the correspondences between disciplinary systems as outlined by Foucault on one hand and Spartan choruses on the other, but the key point is by now likely clear—choruses had the hallmarks of a disciplinary system and must have been a highly effective means of imposing discipline on unmarried Spartan girls.

Furthermore, choral dance required synchronized, highly regimented movement and thus had much the same effect as military drill. It was, as a result, a form of “domestication” that taught Spartiate girls the habit of prompt, unthinking obedience. This subject attracted Xenophon’s attention in the *Oeconomicus*. Ischomachos, in urging his wife to run the household in a highly organized fashion, speaks about choruses:

My dear, there is nothing so convenient or so good for human beings as order. Thus, a chorus is a combination of human beings; but when the members of it do as they choose, it becomes mere confusion, and there is no pleasure in watching it; but when they act and chant in an orderly fashion, then those same men at once seem worth seeing and worth hearing. Again, my dear, an army in disorder is a confused mass, an easy prey to enemies, a disgusting sight to friends, and utterly useless. . . . But an army in orderly array is a noble sight to friends, and an unwelcome spectacle to the enemy Nay, even on the march where order is kept, though they number tens of thousands, all move steadily forward as one man⁸⁴

8.3–7, trans. E. Marchant

83. Anastasia-Erasmia Peponi has proposed a persuasive reading of Alcman’s Louvre *partheneion* that stresses the importance of optical perception in the poem (Peponi 2004). Alcman’s poetry obviously predates the period under consideration here, but it enjoyed enduring popularity in Sparta. It is also worth noting that Anton Powell has argued that Spartans showed a particular facility for visual propaganda (Powell 1988).

84. The assumption that the mark of a good chorus is its ability to move in a perfectly ordered fashion is found in ancient sources of widely variant dates. Compare, for instance, Xenophon with Dio of Prusa (39.4, 48.7, and Bowie 2006: 70–71). One particularly interesting, relevant occurrence is Nicias spending large sums of money to build a bridge between Rheneia and Delos so that the

Xenophon draws a direct link between an orderly chorus and an orderly army. The effects of regularly dancing in a chorus were similar to those produced by marching in formation.⁸⁵

A chorus was, in fact, in some ways more regimented than a marching army because of the combined effects of dance and song. In both marching and choruses the movement of individuals was synchronized by the imposition of specific, required steps. In choruses, this synchronization was taken further by having movement keyed to music and by having the members of the chorus sing together. In some of the earliest modern anthropological work on dance, Radcliffe-Brown pointed out that “in the dance the individual submits to the action upon him of the community; he is constrained, by the immediate effect of rhythm as well as by custom, to join in, and he is required to conform in his own actions and movements to the needs of the common activity.”⁸⁶ The combination of dance and song thus bound the members of a chorus into a tightly integrated group.

Participation in sport placed Spartan girls in environments that were in all probability no less disciplinary than those they encountered in choral dance. The difficulty here is that we have almost nothing in the way of detailed information about how Spartan girls trained for and competed in sports. It is, therefore, impossible to explore in any depth the disciplinary ramifications of Spartan girls’ participation in sport. There can be no doubt that sport put girls in rule-governed, highly physical contexts that had at least some of the features highlighted by Foucault and Bourdieu. Moreover, in the case of Spartan males, about whose athletic endeavors we are better informed and which are considered below, it is clear that sport had a profound disciplinary effect. One might also note in this regard that there has been a considerable amount of scholarly work on the effects of highly regimented sport training programs on female athletes in the modern world. For example, a study of females at an elite gymnastics school in Australia described the environment as one that involved “an extensive and elaborate process of corporeal discipline” and found that it “prevented the gymnasts . . . from developing independence and self-determination,” making them instead into “docile athletes.”⁸⁷ One must of course exercise a great deal of caution in reading such radically different contexts together, but this and similar studies are at minimum suggestive and are more likely indicative.

Athenian chorus sent to the festival of Apollo could arrive in Delos in good order (rather than disembarking in chaos, Plut. *Nic.* 3.5–8).

85. In a discussion of the Louvre *partheneion*, Too makes the intriguing argument that the well-ordered chorus was seen as a metaphor for and embodiment of the well-ordered community (Too 1997), but the evidence she presents is not as compelling as it might be, at least in regard to the Classical period. The metaphor is well attested in later periods; see Bowie 2006: 70–77.

86. Radcliffe-Brown 1933: 251–52. Radcliffe-Brown was inclined to see this as a matter of consensus rather than coercion (see below). See also the discussion in Bloch 1974, who understood song and dance in ritual as means of imposing control on individual verbalization and movement and hence as a form of compulsion.

87. Barker-Ruchti and Tinning 2010: 299 and 243. Much of the relevant earlier literature is cited by the authors of that article.

Foucault's and Bourdieu's work helps make it clear that the physical activities of Spartan girls subtly coerced from them a habit of prompt, almost unthinking, compliance with the implicit and explicit demands made by (mostly male) authority figures and patriarchal social norms. Bourdieu's work also suggests that choral dance and sport helped create a particular kind of physical disposition that strongly reinforced females' subordinate social roles.⁸⁸ These activities profoundly shaped their *habitus* and the embodiment of that *habitus* in the form of bodily *hexis*.⁸⁹ This insight would not have come as a surprise to Aristotle, whose prescriptions for the educational system of the ideal state include the observation that, "boys should be handed over to the care of the *gymnastês* and *paidotribês*, for the latter imparts a certain quality to the *hexis* of the body and the former to its actions" (*Pol.* 1338b8–9, trans. H. Rackham, slightly modified).

Choral dance and sport thus produced girls with physical deportments fitted to their expected, subordinate social roles, and it would be a mistake to underestimate the profound effects of the inculcation of such deportments. As Lois McNay has argued, "hierarchical gender relations are embedded in bodily *hexis*."⁹⁰

In addition to its coercive effects, sport also socialized girls into norms to which they were expected to conform, in part by emphasizing and fostering beauty and a related preparedness to serve as the object of an eroticized male gaze. The socializing effects of sport were in large part a product of the fact that it was to a considerable extent a ritualized activity.⁹¹

Some of the most basic questions one might ask about ritual—what it is, what it does, how it does it—all remain the subject of vigorous, ongoing debate, and the volume of relevant scholarship is prodigious.⁹² It is neither possible nor necessary to summarize and synthesize that scholarship here, and it is sufficient for our purposes to adopt a relatively simple approach and consider ritualized activities

88. This point is raised but not fully developed in Clark 1996.

89. Bourdieu defined *habitus* as "systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations" and *hexis* as "a political mythology realized, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of *feeling* and *thinking*" (Bourdieu 1977 (1972): 72 and 93–94, respectively).

90. McNay 1999: 100.

91. It is outside the scope of this essay to discuss the important socializing effects of choral dance, which are regularly highlighted in the ancient sources. It is now a commonplace in the relevant scholarship to view choral performances as powerful means of socialization and social control. Steven Lonsdale, for example, has argued that "musical education was the primary means of socializing the young in archaic Greece, where, as in many cultures, dance and music served as a pleasurable means for maintaining social order" (Lonsdale 1993: 35). The socializing capacity of choral dance is explored in a number of important pieces of scholarship, including, but by no means limited to, Bacon 1995, Bierl 2009: 18–23, Clark 1996, Herington 1985: 3–40, Kowalzig 2004, and Kowalzig 2007.

92. A "carefully selected" bibliography of essential scholarly work on ritual theory covering the years 1966 to 2005 lists 620 items (Kreinath, Snoek, and Stausberg 2007).

as having two distinct dimensions, communication and practice, and as serving as both *models of* and *models for* society.⁹³

With respect to their communicative dimension, ritualized activities are “flexible forms of symbolic activity that reaffirm cultural values and a sense of order.”⁹⁴ As models of society, ritualized activities have the capacity to present idealized and simplified visions of how society and relations between individuals could or should be.⁹⁵ Geertz famously described cockfights staged by the inhabitants of Bali as “a story they tell themselves about themselves.”⁹⁶ The fact that ritualized activities are by definition set apart from everyday life is particularly significant, as they are for this reason immune to many of the mundane necessities of existence that otherwise can generate a divergence between the normative and normal. As a result, ritualized activities frequently, perhaps typically, reflect social norms with a degree of faithfulness that is otherwise difficult to achieve.

The socializing power of ritualized activities is greatly enhanced by practice. The participants in ritualized activities do not simply hear about societal norms, they themselves enact those norms. As Geertz put it, “in a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world.”⁹⁷ Performance constitutes an essential bridge between ritual activities serving as models of social norms and serving as models for actual behavior because participants reproduce idealized forms of behavior they are expected to manifest in some form in their daily lives. Ritualized activities inculcate habits of thought and behavioral dispositions that shape the actions of individuals in all settings and thus serve as models for activity outside the ritualized sphere.

Sport and choral dance were ritualized activities that required unmarried Spartan girls to enact social norms that called for them to be graceful and beautiful objects of erotic desire. Spartan women were famed for their loveliness throughout the Greek world; the Delphic oracle for instance reputedly singled out Sparta for praise on account of the attractiveness of its women (Ath. 278e).⁹⁸ When they played sports, Spartan girls presented themselves in a fashion that emphasized their sexual desirability in ways and to an extent that would have been impermissible in non-ritualized contexts. This is most obvious from the revealing outfits that Spartan girls wore while playing sports, which overtly in-

93. A good introduction to ritual theory can be found in Bell 2005: 7849. For a longer, more detailed discussion, see Bell 1997. The view of rituals as models of and for society is elucidated in Geertz 1973: 87–125. On choruses as models of and for communities, see Stehle 1997: 26–70.

94. Bell 2005: 7849.

95. This is a close paraphrase taken from the excellent discussion of ritual found at Kowalzig 2007: 34. In this case, the scholarship on rituals can be directly applied to ritualized activities with only minimal adjustment.

96. Geertz 1973: 448.

97. Geertz 1973: 112.

98. Many of the relevant sources are discussed in Pomeroy 2002: 131–33.

vited an eroticized male gaze.⁹⁹ One might note in this regard that the only context other than athletics and choral dance for which ancient authors suggest Spartan girls dressed provocatively was processions, which were held as part of religious festivals and hence constituted another ritualized environment (Plut. *Lyc.* 14.2–4).

Moreover, convergence between ideal and reality was further enforced by the very nature of the activities themselves, which helped produce Spartan female bodies that met an accepted standard of beauty. Female beauty in Alcman's poetry consists of "above-average height, slim, well-turned ankles, and long, flowing, fair hair."¹⁰⁰ Andrew Stewart has argued that the female figures depicted on the bronze handles discussed above reveal a specifically Spartan aesthetic:

Their long thighs, flat flanks, gently swelling abdomens, high but quite small breasts, relatively broad shoulders, oval faces, wide-open eyes, and long, flowing tresses give us our closest insight into the Spartan collective's image of ideal femininity at its zenith.

Stewart notes that this image of ideal femininity is "boyish" and "incipiently feminine."¹⁰¹ (See Figure 1.) He also points out that the use of such figures as handles of mirrors presumably used by Spartan women helped reinforce in a very direct fashion the aesthetic they reflected.

A studied dedication to sport and choral dance from an early age must have shaped the bodies of Spartan girls in ways that helped produce conformity to idealized notions of feminine beauty, and these activities were in all likelihood understood as useful in part for precisely that reason. An unusually high level of physical activity would have helped Spartan girls achieve the sort of physiques that were felt to be desirable. Lampito, upon being complimented for her robust beauty, attributes it to sport and dance (Ar. *Lys.* 77–84). Plutarch, in discussing the habit of Spartan girls of walking nude in processions, states that "it encouraged simple habits and an enthusiasm for physical fitness" (*Lyc.* 14.4). An active interest in Sparta in shaping bodies to fit ideals is evident in Xenophon's comment that the diet of Spartan boys was restricted in part because Lycurgus "believed that a diet which kept bodies slim would contribute to an increase in height" (*Lac.* 2.5). Plutarch repeats Xenophon's observation almost verbatim and adds that "Good looks are produced in the same way" (*Lyc.* 17.5, cf. *Mor.* 237f). One might recall in this regard Maud Gleason's argument that Greeks tended to see gender as biologically underdetermined and hence something that needed to be

99. Plutarch records that King Charillos, upon being asked why unmarried Spartan girls went out in public unveiled, whereas married women were veiled, replied that unmarried girls needed to find husbands and the married women needed to stay with the husbands they had (*Mor.* 232c).

100. Cartledge 2001: 115.

101. Stewart 1997: 115.

achieved through proper *askêsis*.¹⁰² It is noteworthy that Helen was an object of worship in Sparta and that she was believed to be able to beautify those who worshipped her (Hdt. 6.61) and was connected in some fashion to girls' sport (Theoc. 18.22–25). As a result, athletics contributed meaningfully to producing girls who were viewed and viewed themselves as beautiful objects of desire and who conformed more closely than they otherwise might have to a specific ideal of beauty.

The element of practice in ritualized activities extends beyond performance to the creation of what Catherine Bell has called the “ritualized body.” Bell, who built directly upon Bourdieu’s ideas, argued that regular participation in ritualized activities *physically* inculcates the thought and behavioral patterns underlying and underpinning such activities and that “as bodies . . . absorb the logic of spaces and temporal events, they then project these structural schemes, reproducing liturgical arrangements out of their own ‘sense’ of the fitness of things.”¹⁰³ This is a critical insight because it makes clear how ritualized activities can shape behavior, without participants being aware that they are being socialized, potentially even against their conscious inclinations.¹⁰⁴ Communication and practice are thus complementary aspects of ritualized activities that in some ways can be seen as exhibiting the same differential accentuation of mind and body we encountered in Foucault and Bourdieu’s work on disciplinary regimes.

Unmarried Spartan girls were thus coerced and socialized in both mind and body into ways of thinking and acting that carried over to the parts of their lives that had nothing at all to do with sport. If Sparta was indeed remarkable for producing what were seen as desirable women, that may well have been because Spartan society presented unmarried girls with unusual demands and opportunities, in the form of an atypically intense sport regime, to develop a habit of compliance, to internalize expectations about their social bearing and physical appearance, and to shape their bodies to conform to expectations, as well as powerful coercion, in the form of physical discipline delivered through sport and choral dance and through regular subjection to the gaze of others, to do so.¹⁰⁵

102. Gleason 1990. There is a striking degree of similarity between this belief and current feminist theories about the creation of gender through performance (see, for example, Butler 1990).

103. Bell 2005: 7853. For a full discussion, see Bell 1992: 94–117. Attention to the physical dimension of rituals can be seen as an extension of the attention paid to the importance of the merging of form and content in rituals (on which, see Tambiah 1985) and their frequently synesthetic nature (on which, see Bloch 1974).

104. The capacity of ritualized activities to socialize participants regardless of how those participants might feel about the activities in which they are engaged is particularly significant in light of Tambiah’s influential work on ritual. Tambiah argued that ritual involves conventionalized forms of behavior from which participants are typically emotionally distanced (Tambiah 1985: 131–37). Bell’s work shows that even when people do nothing more than go through the motions while participating in ritualized activities, their bodies may be granting “a form of consent that the mind could refuse” (Bourdieu 1988: 161).

105. There is an extensive and ever-growing collection of scholarship on the bodies and body image of female athletes in the modern world (see Birrell 2000 and the bibliography provided

With the coercive and socializing dimensions of Spartan girls' sport clarified, we turn our attention to consensus. Two of the more important ways of building consensus are clearly defined ideals and large gatherings. Clearly defined ideals, even if they are not always lived up to, offer shared reference points that individuals can use to measure and shape their own actions. Gathering as many of a group's members as possible creates shared experiences that bind individuals together and helps them develop a sense of being part of a unified entity with shared norms. That in turn offers strong encouragement for individuals to privilege those norms, particularly since such gatherings can generate a special kind of energy, what Durkheim termed effervescence, that impels individuals to understand themselves as members of the assembled group.¹⁰⁶ A large gathering, particularly in the form of a ritualized activity that purports to be representative of a group, may foster consensus by means of a certain element of deception because it:

both implies and demonstrates a relatively unified corporate body, often leading participants to assume that there is more consensus than there actually is. It leads all to mistake the minimal consent of its participants for an underlying consensus or lack of conflict, even when some conflict is objectified and reembodyed.¹⁰⁷

Athletics is likely to have fostered consensus about and voluntary adherence to social norms on the part of Spartan girls. We have already seen that athletics presented models of and for certain aspects of Spartan society and in that way offered clearly defined ideals to Spartan girls. Athletics also took Spartan girls out of the private space of their households and brought them together for shared experiences. A sense of intense bonding is so commonly felt and expressed by members of sports teams in the present day as to require no discussion, and it is probable that at least some Spartan girls at least some of the time had similar sentiments. Participation in sport may well have led Spartan girls to consent actively to social norms in the belief, mistaken or not, that the participation of other girls reflected their voluntary adherence to those norms.

The obvious difficulty here is the sources. Discipline and socialization operate to a large extent below the threshold of consciousness, and so one would not expect to find them reflected with any regularity in individuals' accounts of their experiences in athletics. Consensus, on the other hand, is by definition a matter of conscious acceptance, but female voices are absent from the relevant ancient sources, and it is, as a result, impossible to trace directly a connection between

therein). One might well suspect that the arguments that Irigaray and others have made about the patriarchal nature of the gaze (see, for instance, Irigaray 1985 [1977]: 23–33) in the modern world might well apply to the unusually exposed bodies of the female athletes of ancient Sparta as well, but the nature of the sources render this a purely speculative topic.

106. Durkheim 1965 (1912): 245–54, 462–73.

107. Bell 1992: 210; cf. Moore and Myerhoff 1977: 24.

athletics and consensus, despite the strength of the *prima facie* case for such a connection.

In sum, athletics (and choral dance) had a substantial effect on the lives of unmarried Spartan females. Though athletics is seen as reflecting and enabling liberation in the lives of women in the modern day, we need to be cautious about retrojecting that understanding into ancient Sparta. The dialectic between athletics' ability to empower and its ability to reinforce norms that underpin the prevailing social order was, in the case of Spartan girls, tilted strongly toward the latter. If athletics did to some degree empower Spartan females, it did as much or more to enmesh them in profoundly patriarchal norms that were a fundamental part of the Spartan social order.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, far from reflecting a society in which females were unusually liberated, the unusual degree to which Spartan girls participated in athletics might be seen as an index of the extent to which they were driven to adhere to social norms that were anything but liberating.

7. SOCIAL NORMS FOR SPARTAN MALES

In discussing the status of the helots, Plutarch quotes a saying to the effect that "there is nothing to match either the freedom of the free man at Sparta or the slavery of the slave."¹⁰⁹ If one follows Aristotle and takes it as a defining trait of the free man that "he does not live under the constraint of another" (*Rhet.* 1.9.27), one can see how Spartiates could be considered more truly free than most. They represented a small minority that occupied a clearly pre-eminent place in the Spartan socio-political system and enjoyed a great deal more power and autonomy than the other inhabitants of the Spartan state. It might, therefore, seem odd to talk about Spartiates being the object of powerful mechanisms for inducing compliance with social norms.

But Spartiates' freedom was in many ways more apparent than real, because they were subjected from an early age to an array of strict, one might almost say stifling, regimes that left them little room to breathe. Indeed, Plutarch also observes that "Spartiates' training extended into adulthood, for no one was permitted to live as he pleased. Instead, just as in a camp, so in the city, they followed a prescribed lifestyle and devoted themselves to communal concerns. They viewed themselves absolutely as part of their country, rather than as individuals" (*Lyc.* 24.1, cf. 25.3). A relevant consideration that has not attracted as much attention as it should is the fact that all Spartiates resided in Sparta itself all the time.¹¹⁰ Constant propinquity heightened the possibilities of social control,

108. Cf. the cautionary notes in Kyle 2007a.

109. This saying is supplied without attribution by Plutarch (*Lyc.* 28.5); it is attributed by Libanius to Critias (*Or.* 25.63).

110. The fascinating question of how this arrangement was compatible with control of an unusually large territory worked by an enslaved population is explored in Hodkinson 2003.

as did the requirement that Spartiates spend relatively little time in the private space of their *oikos*. A story recounted by Plutarch, that King Agis met with staunch opposition from high-ranking Spartan officials when he returned from a military campaign and wanted to dine at home with his wife instead of in the *sysition* to which he belonged (*Lyc.* 12.3, though cf. *Hdt.* 6.57.3), is symptomatic of a *diaita* that gave individuals little space to live their lives as they wished.

Males from Spartiate families, like their female counterparts, were thus bound into a tightly woven social fabric. And, as was the case with girls, athletics shaped the behavior of males via coercion, socialization, and consensus. It inculcated by means of socialization some of the more important norms that applied to Spartiates, viz. subordination of the individual to the group, playing the part of the soldier, and a readiness to engage in meritocratic status competition and to live with the resulting inequalities.¹¹¹ It also heightened compliance with those and other norms by inculcating by means of coercion the habit of obedience and induced voluntary adherence to social norms by means of fostering consensus.

The importance of the subordination of the individual Spartan to the group requires little discussion. It emerges clearly from the passage from Plutarch's *Lycurgus* quoted above and permeates the discussion of Spartan customs in Xenophon's *Lakedaimonion Politeia* (see, for instance, 6.1–5).¹¹² “Playing the part of the soldier” is a more complicated issue because it involves differentiating between military reality on one hand and a social role on the other; this issue will be discussed in more detail below. Meritocratic status competition is in some ways an even more complex matter. The reasons for the importance of meritocratic status competition in Sparta and the mechanisms by which it was enacted warrant careful exploration because they are fundamental to our understanding of the social history of Spartan athletics.

The Spartan *politeia* became markedly more inclusive over the course of the Archaic period. Power and influence were initially concentrated in the hands of a small group of men from very wealthy families. After a good deal of volatility, reforms were put in place that gave social and political privileges to men from less wealthy but still prosperous households. After those reforms, all male citizens were notionally equal (hence their use of the term *homoioi*), and a number of measures were put into place that helped create a high degree of egalitarianism among Spartiates. The most obvious example is the state-supervised educational system. As Jean Ducat has noted, “to the extent that it was a state institution,

111. Athletics socialized Spartiates in other norms, but it is impossible to deal with all of them in the present context. The three norms highlighted here were among the most important that applied to Spartiates and were closely tied to the maintenance of the social order. (As indicated above, it is fallacious to view any society as a homeostatic system all the parts of which directly contribute to its maintenance.)

112. A good modern discussion of this issue can be found in Hodkinson 1983, who identifies “the priority of collective interests” as one of the defining traits of Spartan society. For the economic dimensions of this impulse, see Christesen 2004.

education was the same for everyone. Rich children, poor children, sons from prominent families, sons from ordinary ones, were mixed together in age-classes and ‘troops’ The aim of this egalitarian treatment was, obviously, to create citizens who were all ‘alike.’”¹¹³

However, complete equality among Spartiates was an ideal that never became a reality. The sharp inequalities that existed between the two groups that merged to form the *homoioi* diminished but never disappeared. Some Spartan families, probably mostly those that had been particularly prominent at the start of the Archaic period, continued throughout the Classical period to enjoy a privileged position in Spartan political, military, and social life. The result was, as Anton Powell has astutely observed, “an oligarchy within an oligarchy.”¹¹⁴

Moreover, the Spartan *politeia* strongly encouraged certain kinds of meritocratic competition between Spartiates and offered rewards to those who competed successfully, in the form of social status (*timê*) and positions of political and military leadership. That competition thus created inequalities between winners and losers.

There were, as a result, two irresolvable tensions in relationships between Spartiates. A consciously fostered tendency toward egalitarianism was counterbalanced by a tendency toward differentiation in social standing and *de facto* social and political privileges. And a tendency to assign social standing and social and political privileges based on inherited wealth and position was counterbalanced by a tendency to assign social standing and social and political privileges based on the results of meritocratic competition.

8. MERITOCRATIC STATUS COMPETITION AND ATHLETICS IN SPARTA

Athletics was one of the basic forms of meritocratic competition in Sparta in the Classical period, and Spartiates who distinguished themselves as athletes enjoyed great prestige. This is evident in the special treatment accorded to

113. Ducat 2006b: 169. Sparta’s political history is complex and imperfectly understood and relevant issues both large and small remain the subject of scholarly debate. The perspective articulated here reflects in a general way the views on the history of Archaic and Classical Greece elucidated in Donlan 1999 and Morris 2000 and draws heavily on recent scholarship on Spartan history, noteworthy among which are Cartledge 1987, Cartledge 2002, Finley 1987: 161–77, Hodkinson 1983, and Hodkinson 1997. The analysis presented here does not include explicit discussion of the athletic activities of Sparta’s kings, who participated in status competition, entered their horses into equestrian contests, and sought to associate themselves with notably successful athletes in order to elevate their social standing (see the discussion in Christesen 2010a). However, despite their prominence, the kings’ athletic activities did not, in and of themselves, have the same sort of powerful effect on the Spartan social order as mass participation by Spartiates. The focus here is, therefore, on the latter rather than the former, which was sufficiently anomalous as to require separate discussion that cannot be undertaken here.

114. Powell 2001: 103.

Olympic victors.¹¹⁵ A few extravagantly successful Spartan Olympic victors—Hipposthenes, Hetoimokles, Chionis, Kyniska (and possibly others)—literally became objects of worship.¹¹⁶ Less spectacular rewards awaited other Spartan athletes who triumphed at Olympia. Many Greek communities lavished financial rewards on their Olympic victors. That ran directly counter to the ethos of athletic competition in Sparta, and, according to Plutarch, Spartiate Olympic victors were given the more appropriate reward of the right to fight alongside the Spartan kings in battle. Plutarch recounts a story of a Spartan athlete who refused a major bribe to lose intentionally in the wrestling finals at Olympia. When asked what he gained from his victory, the Spartan replied, “In battle against the enemy my place will be in front of the king” (*Lyc.* 22.4, cf. *Mor.* 639e).¹¹⁷ Although the veracity of this story is open to question, it is noteworthy that it draws an opposition between wealth on one hand and status won through open competition on the other.¹¹⁸

Given the status-generating effects of athletic success, it should come as no surprise that even those Spartan athletes who had won in less high-profile contests than the Olympics were eager to advertise their successes. Numerous commemorative monuments erected by victorious athletes dating to the late Archaic and Classical periods have been found in and around Sparta. Most were probably erected as dedications in religious sanctuaries, especially those of Athena Chalkioikos on the acropolis of Sparta and of Apollo at Amyklai. A considerable fraction of these dedications took the form of *stélai*, the most well known example of which is of course the Damonon *stêlê*. Other functionally similar pieces include bronze figurines of athletes, a life-size relief sculpture of a discus thrower, and inscribed jumping weights and discuses.¹¹⁹

While athletics provided Spartiates with an important venue for meritocratic competition, the ongoing tendency to assign social and political privileges based on inherited wealth and position was also expressed in athletics, specifically in regard to horse racing. Horse racing, particularly chariot racing, was a proverbially expensive activity. Wealthy Spartiates raced horses from an early date, but they enjoyed almost improbable success in chariot racing for a span of about 75 years starting in the middle of the fifth century. This is evident from the Olympic victor list, which, although incomplete, indicates that Spartiates won the four-horse chariot race at Olympia in 448, 444, 440, 432, 428, 424, 420, 396, 392, and 388. Reflecting on their successes at Olympia, Pausanias remarked that after the

115. Hodkinson 1999: 167–70.

116. Much of the evidence for the heroization of athletes in Sparta comes from Pausanias, but there is no doubt that most if not all of the cults for athletes that Pausanias encountered were already extant in the Classical period. On the heroization of athletes in Sparta, see Christesen 2010a.

117. The Spartan kings' interest in having Olympic victors near them in battle likely had to do with the special aura that was felt to attach itself to men who triumphed at Olympia. See Kurke 1993.

118. Other evidence for the special treatment accorded in Sparta to athletic victors can be found in a Spartan tomb in the Kerameikos in Athens (Hook 1932, Willemsen 1977) and in inscriptions on gravestones in Sparta (*IG* 5.1.708, Hodkinson 1999: 170–73).

119. Hodkinson 1999: 152–56.

Persian Wars, the Spartans “were keener breeders of horses than all the rest of the Greeks” (6.2.1, trans. J. Frazer).¹²⁰

Spartiates’ rather sudden domination of the single most prestigious horse race in the Greek world had to do in part with money. Stephen Hodkinson has tied the beginnings of Spartiate success in chariot racing at Olympia to a concentration in wealth that came about after the massive earthquake that hit Sparta c. 464. This earthquake resulted in huge loss of life, and a number of people seem to have inherited a great deal of property and to have used their newly acquired riches to race chariots. It is also likely that once one prominent Spartiate family succeeded in chariot racing, others felt prompted or even obliged to follow suit.¹²¹

Spartan success in Olympic chariot racing, however, was as much about motivation as money. In a place in which conscious efforts were made to reduce the opportunities to acquire status through the display of wealth (see section 9), chariot racing offered rich Spartans the possibility of gaining *timê* primarily through the expenditure of large sums of money.¹²² And the potential gains were substantial. Critias wrote that he wished for “the wealth of the Skopadai, the magnanimity of Cimon, and the victories of Arkesilaos the Spartan” (F8, trans. K. Freeman; Arkesilaos won two Olympic victories in the four-horse chariot race, probably in 448 and 444). Above and beyond the respect they earned, at least some Spartiates who won chariot-racing victories at Olympia seem to have been given important diplomatic and military posts in part because of their successes on the track. Stephen Hodkinson has argued that “a chariot victory could help a man to leapfrog above his former status into positions of leadership he would not otherwise have gained.”¹²³

The use of wealth to gain status via Olympic chariot racing met with considerable opposition in Sparta. This is evident from the parameters of the limits that were imposed on the commemoration in Sparta of successes in athletic contests.¹²⁴ Spartan Olympic victors who were heroized received monuments, but only after their death. None of the dozens of extant *epinikia* from the sixth and fifth centuries (with one possible exception) were written for a Spartan.¹²⁵ The earliest known

120. There is some uncertainty about precise dates, but the number of victories is reliable. The hiatus between the victories of 420 and 396 was at least in part a result of the fact that Spartans were banned from competition at Olympia for an indeterminate period starting in 420. See Hornblower 2000. The dates supplied here for Spartan chariot victories are taken from Hodkinson 2000: 308. Spartiate success in Olympic chariot racing declined sharply after the first quarter of the fourth century; the primary reason for this striking development was probably economic. The huge loss of territory and attendant wealth that followed Leuktra, along with continuing military pressure, made it much more difficult to find resources to lavish on chariot racing.

121. Hodkinson 2000: 307–17.

122. Cf. Cartledge 2002: 135; Cartledge argues that Spartiates spent heavily on chariot racing rather than on conspicuous consumption of other kinds and that Olympic chariot-racing victories “satisfied the claims both of personal prestige and of patriotism.”

123. Hodkinson 2000: 326. For Athenian parallels, see Davies 1984: 97–105.

124. Hodkinson 1999: 152–76, Hodkinson 2000: 317–23.

125. The exception is Ibycus S166, on which see Barron 1984: 20–21.

monuments erected in Sparta to celebrate a still-living Olympic victor date to the fourth century. A fragment of a Doric capital with Kyniska's name on it was found in the excavations at Sparta (*IG* 5.1.235); this capital may have originally been part of a dedication that celebrated Kyniska's successes at Olympia.¹²⁶ Euryleionis, winner in the Olympic two-horse chariot race in 368, had a statue in Sparta (Paus. 3.17.6), which probably commemorated her victory. The first victor in the *gymnikos agôn* at Olympia who seems to have had a monument at Sparta in his own lifetime was Deinosthenes, who won the *stadion* in 316 (Paus. 6.16.8).

The existence of numerous monuments in Sparta from the sixth and fifth centuries celebrating success in the *gymnikos agôn* at local athletic contests shows that different standards applied to victors in games other than the Olympics. No ancient source provides any information as to why it was possible for a long period of time for Spartans who won in local contests but not at Olympia to commemorate their victories, but it likely had to do with the pursuit of social standing by means of wealth. Olympic victors enjoyed prestige and an aura of sanctity that greatly exceeded anything that could be won from a victory in a local contest, and *epinikia* and monuments were both expensive and typically paid for out of the victor's own pockets. There may have been a feeling in Sparta that it was a potential threat to the egalitarian social order to allow an Olympic victor to use wealth to increase his already very considerable prestige.¹²⁷

Concerns about the use of wealth are evident in the fact that Spartan victors in the *hippikos agôn*, both at Olympia and elsewhere, faced much tighter restrictions on commemorating their success than those that applied to victors in the *gymnikos agôn*. Of the numerous dedications by athletic victors found at Sparta and dating to the period before the fourth century, only one, the Damonon *stêlê*, celebrates equestrian victories.¹²⁸ Damonon may have been able to erect his monument because he was atypical in having driven his own chariots and ridden his own horses to victory. In this sense his accomplishments were like those of victors in the *gymnikos agôn* in being demonstrations of superior physical prowess, not of conspicuous wealth.¹²⁹ Virtually all of the Spartiate victors in Olympic chariot racing starting in the middle of the sixth century erected expensive commemorative monuments, but at Olympia rather than Sparta. The restrictions that applied in Sparta evidently did not carry over to Olympia.¹³⁰

126. Hodkinson 2000: 328.

127. Cf. Mann 2001: 121–63. Mann's argument that the elevated status of Olympic victors was a major concern in Sparta may be more applicable to commemorative monuments than to the reasons why Spartan success in the *gymnikos agôn* at Olympia diminished sharply after the early sixth century.

128. The Damonon *stêlê* was clearly intended as a celebration of success in horse-racing. It was topped by a relief showing a four-horse chariot and Damonon's equestrian victories are listed first.

129. Hodkinson 2000: 305–306.

130. Agesilaus' involvement in Kyniska's Olympic victory might be read as an attempt on his part to curb pursuit of social status through equestrian competition by demonstrating that it was

It is thus apparent that athletics was an essential, if contested, venue for meritocratic status competition in Sparta in the Classical period. The question of why meritocratic status competition in the form of athletics was so important in Sparta permits of a number of different answers, at varying levels of complexity and abstraction. One answer has to do with inherited assumptions about status competition and about the relationship between war and athletics. By the eighth century at the latest, as is evident in the Homeric poems, the acquisition of *timê* required the demonstration of *aretê*, and there was no more prestigious way to do so than to demonstrate superior physical prowess on the battlefield. That was not, however, without its difficulties because *timê* was inherently relative; it was not measured in absolute terms but in relation to other members of one's community.¹³¹ Furthermore, the battlefield was a messy environment that was not ideally suited to testing the relative talents of men from the same community.

Athletic contests were, from the perspective of establishing the relative standing of the men in any given community, ideal substitutes for the battlefield and from an early date were an essential source of *timê*. Athletics provided a setting in which men could compete on equal terms in activities that made their relative levels of physical prowess clear. Moreover, the expectation was that the great athlete would also be a great warrior. When Odysseus declines an invitation to participate in an athletic contest in Phaiaikia, he responds:

Your slander fans the anger in my heart!
 I'm no stranger to sports—for all your taunts—
 I've held my place in the front ranks, I tell you
 I'm no disgrace in the world of games where men compete.
 Well I know how to handle a fine polished bow,
 the first to hit my man in a mass of enemies.

Od. 8.182–84, 214–17, trans. R. Fagles

It is noteworthy that Odysseus freely mingles his achievements as athlete and warrior.

This brings us back to athletics as a form of meritocratic competition in Sparta. The basic patterns of status competition that were already in place by the time of Homer continued to be operative throughout the Greek world in the Classical period, and no doubt encouraged Spartiates to see athletics as a key form of competition.

something that even a woman could do. However, the relevant sources permit a range of possible interpretations of Agesilaus' and Kyniska's motivations. See Kyle 2003 and Millender 2009.

131. On competition and *timê* in ancient Greece, see Burckhardt 1998 (1898–1902): 160–213 and Gouldner 1969: 41–77. Burckhardt's ideas about diachronic change in competition in the Greek world and its social effects need to be treated with some caution; see the discussion in Ulf 2011.

9. MALE ATHLETICS AND SOCIAL ORDER IN SPARTA IN THE CLASSICAL PERIOD: SOCIALIZATION

The preceding discussion has by no means exhausted the connections between meritocratic status competition and athletics in Sparta, not least because nothing has as yet been said about how meritocratic status competition as carried out in athletics contributed to the maintenance of social order. There are, in that regard, two relevant considerations. First, athletic performance was largely a matter of individual talent and was resistant to the application of wealth. As the Spartan *politeia* became more inclusive and egalitarian, a concerted effort was made to curb the pursuit of social status through conspicuous consumption. For example, *syssitia* replaced *symposia*, and, in a larger sense, Spartan elites adopted a relatively simple lifestyle that reinforced the notion that all Spartiates were equals. Sparta never became a place in which wealth was irrelevant, but continuing efforts were made to erode the connection between wealth and social status. Xenophon notes that Lycurgus “made it more glorious to help one’s fellows by personal effort than by spending money on them, demonstrating that the former is a matter of character, the latter a matter of wealth” (*Lac.* 7.4, cf. 7.3 and *Plut. Lyc.* 24.2). In the same vein, Aristotle observes that in Sparta “there is no distinction between rich and poor. . . . They all have the same food at their public tables, and the rich wear only such clothing as any poor man can afford” (*Pol.* 1294b26–28, trans. S. Everson).

Competition was channeled into activities in which all Spartiates, regardless of their lineage and wealth, could take part on a relatively equal footing. Athletics was crucial in this regard. The sport sociologist John Hargreaves has noted that “sport approximates more to the ideal of a meritocratic social order than any other sphere of social life.”¹³² What matters in athletics, and particularly in athletic competitions, is speed, strength, intelligence, and drive, not social background or family connections. In most societies opportunities to train and to compete can clearly be unequal and that can affect performance, but the socio-economic status and lifestyle of Spartiates were sufficiently similar as to make success or failure in athletics primarily a matter of individual merit.

There was, therefore, a significant degree of *realpolitik* involved in assigning social status based on athletic performance. The inherent meritocratic element in athletics stood in contrast and opposition to the older system of awarding *timê* to wealthy men from “good” families. The operation of that system, left unchecked, could easily have created dangerous resentments among Spartiates who felt that they were functionally excluded from the upper ranks of Spartan society. The meritocratic competition built into athletics was a means by which all Spartiates, regardless of their wealth and family background, had the opportunity to earn *timê* and a privileged position among the *homoioi*. This made all Spartiates into

132. Hargreaves 1986: 111.

stakeholders in the system into which they were born and thus significantly enhanced their loyalty to that system. From this perspective, athletics was important not because of any connection it might have had to warfare, but because athletic success was not something that could be purchased (though the devotion of rich Spartiates to chariot racing shows a desire to do just that).

A second way that meritocratic status competition in athletics supported social order was that it socialized Spartiates into habits that were crucial to the functioning of the Spartan *politeia*. After the changes made to the Spartan *politeia* in the Archaic period, meritocratic competition was a defining element in relationships between Spartiates. Meritocracy is built around the proposition of offering equal opportunity to compete to become unequal; the rewards go to the winners who thus become in some measurable way better off than the losers. Hence meritocratic status competition in Sparta inevitably produced potentially explosive tensions. Plutarch records a saying, ostensibly uttered by the Spartan King Charillos, that the best *politeia* was one in which “the greatest number of citizens were willing to compete against each other over *aretê*, without *stasis*” (*Mor.* 232c).

The tensions generated by meritocratic competition were no doubt exacerbated by expectations springing from the privileges some Spartiate families enjoyed based on inherited position and wealth. One must recall in this regard that there existed among Spartiates a status hierarchy that might be pictured as a ladder. Each person in the status hierarchy occupied a rung on the ladder. Because *timê* was relative, whenever anyone did something that increased his *timê*, he moved up the ladder—and other people necessarily moved down. The loser in a meritocratic competition by definition ranked lower than the winner, and it must have been no easy task to get males from “good” families to accept being bested in meritocratic competition of any kind by a male from a less esteemed household.

Regular participation in sport socialized Spartiates by teaching a readiness to engage in meritocratic status competition and to live with the resulting inequalities. Sport put Spartiates, regularly and from a young age, into competitive environments that privileged ability rather than wealth or social background and that compelled participants to face the consequences of winning and losing.

In thinking about how playing sports shaped Spartiates’ behavior it is necessary to return to the approaches used in exploring girls’ sport and dance. Sport was a ritualized activity that served both as a *model of* and *model for* relationships among Spartiates. As a *model of*, it expressed in an unusually clear fashion ideals about the bases of relationships between Spartiates. Sport was, to paraphrase Geertz, a story that the Spartiates told themselves about how social status should be assigned. The impact of the repeated telling of that story was greatly heightened by the fact that each and every Spartiate personally participated in its performance, over and over and over again. Sport, as a result, also became a *model for* relationships among Spartiates and helped make that story into a reality that extended well outside of sport. The fact that sport was intensely physical meant that it trained both mind and body. In Bell’s terminology, sport produced ritualized

bodies that were imprinted with the habit of meritocratic status competition and that reproduced in other contexts the patterns learned in playing sports.¹³³

The optimal results of this sort of socialization, which taught both an eager readiness to engage in meritocratic competition and to accept the outcome, are perhaps most apparent in regard to the *hippeis*, the elite group of three hundred Spartiates that was given special duties on and off the battlefield. Individuals became one of the *hippeis* through a competitive process open to all Spartiates. In discussing that process Xenophon observes that it brought “the young men together in competitions of virtue” (*Lac.* 4.2). Competition to become one of the *hippeis* was sufficiently intense that powerful resentments were aroused. Xenophon states that those who were not chosen kept a close watch on those who were and that, “This rivalry is . . . most beneficial to the city. It serves to make apparent what the good man has to do, and both parties separately try to be the best and, if necessary, will work individually with all their might to help the city” (*Lac.* 4.5). That sounds well and good until Xenophon goes on to mention the actual consequences of that rivalry: “They (the *hippeis*) must also keep themselves fit, for on account of the rivalry they fight with their fists whenever they meet” (4.6). Meritocratic competition if left unchecked could easily generate dangerous conflicts, and so a matching willingness to accept outcomes was necessary. This is reflected in the (quite possibly fictional) story of Pedaritos, a young Spartiate who smiled when he heard that he had not been selected to be one of the *hippeis*. When asked why he was happy at being rejected, Pedaritos replied that he was overjoyed that Sparta had three hundred men better than him (*Plut. Mor.* 191f, 231b; *Lyc.* 25.4).¹³⁴

Athletics also supported social order in Sparta by socializing Spartiates into the norm of playing the part of the soldier. This is a subject that requires careful handling because it involves differentiating between being a soldier and playing the part of one.

It may at first glance seem unobjectionable to describe Sparta as a militaristic society, but such a characterization is more problematic than it might appear. It is of course true that Sparta possessed a formidable army and that Spartiates, freed by the labor of helots from the need to work to support themselves and their families, were expected to dedicate much of their time to serving the state as citizens and soldiers. However, as Moses Finley pointed out, “militarism in Sparta was in a low key. . . . Sparta was, if anything, less quick to join battle than many other Greek states.”¹³⁵ It is in this vein useful to compare the relative rarity

133. Plutarch points out that Lycurgus “completely filled the city with a quantity of models which would necessarily be encountered all the time by those aiming for excellence, and become familiar with them, so that they would be guided and influenced in this way” (*Lyc.* 27.2).

134. On the *hippeis*, see Figueira 2006. Pedaritos seems to have been a figure of some note in fifth-century Sparta (Figueira 2006: 78n.56).

135. Finley 1987: 171–77 at 171–72. Finley also points out that one of the reasons why Spartiates may have been less than eager for battle was that they served as both army and police force, and their absence from Spartan territory thus heightened the risk of a helot revolt.

with which Spartans fought with the near-constant warfare undertaken by Rome starting in the fourth century. Stephen Hodkinson has recently argued that ancient and modern characterizations of ancient Sparta as little more than an armed camp are ill-founded and misleading.¹³⁶

One reason for the disjuncture between Spartiates' reputation among both ancients and moderns for devotion to all things military and the absence of Roman-style militarism was that playing the part of the soldier was very different from actually being a soldier. The former was a social role enacted in daily, intra-communal interactions, the latter was a life-and-death matter carried out in inter-community fighting on the battlefield. There was, of course, some degree of overlap between the two, but that was minimized by an almost constant necessity for the former and by the relative rarity of the latter.

Spartan society appeared to be much more militaristic than it in fact was because Spartiates led a very public lifestyle that included a strong military element, not in the form of actual fighting or even in serious training for battle, but in the form of playing the part of the soldier. Much of what made Spartiates unique when it came to military matters was that the radical diminution of their economic and familial responsibilities, paired with their highly public lifestyle, simultaneously increased the relative importance of their identity as soldiers and provided them with an unusual number of opportunities to enact that identity.

Playing the part of the soldier involved acting and looking like a soldier. Acting like a soldier entailed a willingness and ability to demonstrate an aggressive, assertive physical prowess and matching level of endurance. This is evident in many Spartan practices and customs, such as restrictions placed on boys' diets, the requirement that they go barefoot much of the time, and, most notoriously, the rite involving cheese-stealing and whipping at the Artemis Orthia sanctuary (Xen. *Lac.* 2.1–9, cf. Plut. *Lyc.* 16.1–7, *Mor.* 237b, 238d–e). The fact that the *Gymnopaïdai* is characterized in the *Laws* (633c) as a “severe test of endurance” shows that such trials continued into adulthood. The sort of assertiveness expected of Spartiates is evident in Xenophon's claim that rivalries between individual Spartiates not infrequently eventuated in fistfights (*Lac.* 4.6) and in Plutarch's comment that at the *Gymnopaïdai* choruses of males of different ages boasted about their past, present, and future courage and strength (*Lyc.* 21.2).¹³⁷

Looking like a soldier was no less important than acting like one. Sparta was a place in which individuals were expected to possess physical qualities that were understood as consonant with normative social roles. We have already seen how this worked for unmarried girls, who were expected to look the part of an object of sexual desire. The equivalent for Spartiates was looking like a soldier, which

136. Hodkinson 2006, Hodkinson 2009.

137. See also Plut. *Mor.* 233f–4a, which recounts a story about two Spartan boys fighting, with one fatally wounding the other with a sickle.

meant having a fit, athletic physique.¹³⁸ In discussing Lycurgus' regulation that all Spartiates must exercise rigorously in gymnasia, Xenophon states that physical training helped produce "good skin, firm flesh, and good health," whereas a failure to train made men "look (ἀναφαίνονται) bloated, ugly, and weak" (*Lac.* 5.8). In discussing the requirement that Spartiates exercise while on campaign, he remarks that "as a result, they are prouder of themselves and have a nobler appearance than others" (ἐλευθεριωτέρους δὲ τῶν ἄλλων φαίνεσθαι, 12.5). Xenophon thus puts as much emphasis on appearance as on actual physical condition.

Two later sources are also informative on this subject. Plutarch tells the following story about the Spartan general Pausanias:

In answer to a man who was weak in body, but was urging that they risk a battle against the enemy by both land and sea, he said, "Are you willing to strip yourself and show what kind of a man you are—you who advise us to fight?"

Mor. 230e, trans. F. Babbitt, slightly modified

Agatharchides of Cnidus, writing in the second century, reported that Spartans saw being out of shape and flabby as a serious lapse. Athenaeus paraphrases Agatharchides as saying that:

among the Lacedaimonians it was accounted no ordinary disgrace to a man if he was seen to have either a figure somewhat lacking in virility or a corpulence that made his belly prominent; hence, every ten days the young warriors were made to stand naked before the ephors.

550c-d = *FGrH* 86 F11, trans. C. Gulick

Agatharchides also recounted a story, dated to sometime around 400, of a particularly fat Spartiate, Nauklides, who was threatened with exile if he did not lose weight (cf. *Ael. VH* 14.7).

Too strict a differentiation between being a soldier and playing the part of one must be avoided, in large measure because the latter had some utility in preparing males for the former. There was, for instance, clearly some overlap in regard to common needs for fitness, a willingness and ability to be physically aggressive, etc. In addition, there was some utility to looking fierce on the battlefield, and Xenophon states that Lycurgus prescribed specific armaments and hair styles for that very reason (*Lac.* 11.3).

Nonetheless, at least some Greeks were well aware that actually being a good soldier was a different thing from playing the part well. Compare, for example, Archilochus F114 West, in which the poet, in the persona of the hard-bitten warrior, derides the tall, good-looking general and states his preference for a

138. Spartan views on appropriate male physique were by no means unique; very similar views were found in Athens (on which, see Winkler 1990).

short and brave leader, with the Spartan emphasis on looking like a soldier. The qualities called for by the practical realities of warfare were often quite distant from those prized in the social role of the soldier.¹³⁹

The differentiation between being a soldier and playing the part of one was particularly important when it came to athletics, which was probably marginally effective with respect to the former and extremely effective with respect to the latter. There was a strong current of thinking in the ancient Greek world that athletics was a practical means of preparation for warfare. Explicit statements to this effect are found largely in relatively late sources (e.g., Lucian *Anach.* 15, 30; Plut. *Mor.* 639a-40a), but Plato portrays athletics and dance as good forms of military training (*Leg.* 636a, 795e-6e, 814d, 832e-3a), and Aristotle's discussion of the Spartan educational system seems to assume a close link between success in athletics and in warfare (*Pol.* 1338b9-28, cf. Xen. *Mem.* 3.12). Ephorus, in his description of Cretan *nomoi* (which he and other authors saw as being nearly identical to those of Sparta),¹⁴⁰ wrote that an unnamed lawgiver, either Minos or Rhadamanthys, instituted training for war that included "blows received in gymnasia" (*FGrH* 70 F149). Moreover, the requirement that Spartan soldiers exercise twice a day while on campaign (Xen. *Lac.* 12.5-7) suggests that Spartiates believed that athletics helped prepare men for battle. Hence it seems safe to say that at least some Spartiates saw their athletic endeavors as training for war.¹⁴¹

At the same time, the practical value of athletics as a form of military training was a subject of vigorous debate in ancient Greece. It was true from the outset that the overlap between athletics and war was far from perfect. In the *Iliad* the outstanding boxer Epeios admits that he is not a great warrior (23.667-75). Tyrtaios clearly voiced his opinion that a great athlete who was not a great soldier merited no special treatment (F12, ll. 1-14), an opinion that presumes that the former was not always the latter.¹⁴² A fragment from Euripides' satyr play the *Autolykos* features an unnamed speaker saying:

139. Plutarch (*Mor.* 239b) claims that Archilochus was expelled from Sparta when it was discovered that he had composed a poem glorifying throwing away his shield to save his life.

140. Christesen 2010b: 216-18.

141. It is also worth noting that Greek warfare was to some extent itself a ritualized activity that did as much to test the relative physical prowess of groups as it did to determine the outcome of inter-community political or economic struggles. In that respect sport and warfare were similar undertakings, and one was potentially valuable preparation for the other. On the ritualized aspects of Greek warfare, see Hanson 2009: 27-39, though cf. the doubts expressed in Krentz 2007: 76-77. Hans van Wees has recently made the case that sport and some forms of warfare share an essential similarity in being driven largely by status competition and that, as a result, "what we often call 'ritualised' violence in sport or in 'warfare' is better seen as competitiveness in physical prowess in more or less pure form" (Wees 2011: 27).

142. Plutarch preserves a (probably fictional) story about a Spartan mother who, upon hearing that her son had been mortally wounded in battle, remarked, "How much more noble . . . to be victorious on the field of battle and meet death, than to win at the Olympic Games and live!" (*Mor.* 242b, trans. F. Babbitt).

What outstanding wrestler, what swift-footed man, or discus hurler, or expert at punching the jaw has done his ancestral homeland a service by winning a crown? Do they fight with enemies holding discuses in their hands or by kicking through shields with their feet expel the country's enemies? No one standing next to steel indulges in this stupidity.

F282 Kannicht, trans. M. Poliakoff

There was, therefore, considerable disagreement even in the ancient Greek world about just what athletics did in regard to preparing males for battle, and there is little hope of resolving the question at this distance.¹⁴³

What is clear is that athletics was an ideal form of preparing males to play the part of the soldier because it required that they display physical aggression, but in rule-governed environments that limited the kinds and degree of violence they could employ. Whereas the battlefield was an environment in which males confronted enemies from other communities with life and death at stake and with few limits on permissible forms and levels of violence, playing the part of the soldier was something that one did in one's own community and that involved strict constraints on permissible violence. The athletic component built into the Spartan educational system required that all Spartiate boys directly confront their peers from an early age in activities that were always intensely physical and frequently overtly violent. Growing up playing combat sports such as wrestling on a regular basis, to make no mention of *sphairomachia* and the organized fighting at Platanistas, inculcated a very specific set of dispositions. Moreover, boys underwent a series of physical contests and trials that tested their willingness and ability to inflict physical harm on other Spartiates and to suffer harm in turn. However, playing sports also entailed adhering to rules that imposed boundaries on just how much harm an athlete could inflict on an opponent. Here again sport served as a model of and for relationships between Spartiates, and that in turn helped keep the expression of physical aggression among Spartiates at a sustainable level. So, for instance, those who had not been chosen to be *hippeis* might play the part of the soldier and display a high level of physical aggression in attacking their rivals with their fists, but they did not, as it were, declare war and use spears and swords in an attempt to slaughter them.

Furthermore, although playing the part of the soldier was something that manifested itself in nearly all aspects of a male's existence, athletics was one of the primary venues in which men played the soldier. Put another way, athletics not only socialized boys into playing the part of the soldier, but also constituted a key

143. The relationship between athletics and warfare in ancient Greece has been the subject of extended controversy among modern-day scholars (see, for example, Poliakoff 1987: 94–103, Reed 1998, Spivey 2004: 1–29). The disagreements in the ancient Greek world about the extent to which athletics prepared males for warfare were arguably the result of a predisposition to conflate the actual physical reality of fighting on a battlefield with the social role of playing the part of the soldier. Such a conflation was socially convenient, regardless of whether or not it was grounded in reality.

component of a social system that required opportunities for males to play that part. The social need for such opportunities is evident in the Spartan fascination with hunting, another activity that allowed Spartiates to put an aggressive physical prowess on display. Xenophon observes that, unless prevented by public duties, hunting was the “customary and noble pastime” for adult Spartiates (*Lac.* 4.7, cf. *Pl. Leg.* 633b and *Plut. Lyc.* 24.4).¹⁴⁴

A final dimension of sport’s socializing effects on Spartiates was that it inculcated the norm of the subordination of the individual to the group. Spartiates were unusual in ancient Greece in regularly playing formally organized and highly competitive team sports, most notably *sphairomachia*. It need hardly be said that team sports are an activity in which individuals are expected to function as part of a group and which frequently require members of the team to privilege the interests of the group over their individual concerns. The brevity of these comments on subordination should not be taken as an implicit statement of the relative (un)importance of this norm, which was in fact one of the hallmarks of Spartiate society. However, the preceding discussion and the relatively straightforward nature of the issues involved together render extensive discussion unnecessary.

10. MALE ATHLETICS AND SOCIAL ORDER IN SPARTA IN THE CLASSICAL PERIOD: COERCION

The effects of athletics on Spartiates extended well beyond socialization and included the imposition of a habit of disciplined adherence to social norms. Spartiates were subjected from an early age to continuous and powerful coercion, both overt and covert. The element of overt coercion is perhaps most evident from Xenophon’s observation that the official who supervised the state education system, the *paidonomos*, was empowered to inflict punishment on anyone he believed to be negligent and to that end was accompanied by *hêbôntes* carrying whips. The result was that “great respect there stands beside great obedience” (*Lac.* 2.2).

Spartiate males were also subjected to a more subtle form of coercion, which was imposed in part through choral dance. As we have seen, choral dance was a Foucauldian disciplinary system, one that impinged on males as much as females. This does not require extensive further discussion, but the effects on Spartiates of regular participation in choruses should not be underestimated. It had much the same effect as military drill, in which Spartiates engaged with a frequency that set them apart from men in other Greek communities (*Xen. Lac.* 11.1–10). The connection Xenophon draws between a well-ordered chorus and a well-ordered army speaks for itself (*Oec.* 8.3–7). The overlap between dance and drill is also apparent in pyrrhic dancing, which “shows most clearly the marked affinities

144. On hunting in ancient Greece, see Anderson 1985: 17–29 and Barringer 2001.

and overlap between choral and military performance.”¹⁴⁵ Very little is known about the details of pyrrhic dancing in Sparta, but the fact that Aristoxenos traced its origins back to Sparta surely indicates its popularity there in the Classical period.¹⁴⁶ The close links Greeks perceived between choral dance and military drill reflect a shared expectation of strict discipline and subordination. Athenaeus, after quoting Socrates as having said that “those who honor the gods best with choruses are the best in war,” adds that dancing, like armed maneuvers, displayed care for the body and discipline (*eutaxia*) (628f).¹⁴⁷

Athletics was still another means of imposing coercion because it placed Spartan males into a rule-governed environment in which both overt and more subtle forms of compulsion were brought to bear. *Paidotribai* taught Spartan boys formal rules for sports as part of their education and seem to have made regular use of corporal punishment.¹⁴⁸ That was in part a matter of socialization, but it also involved a considerable degree of overt coercion because infractions were met with immediate punishment in the form of flogging. Both boys and men participating in formal athletic competitions were flogged or fined for rule violations. It was not unusual for boys to experience corporal punishment, but, starting in the Archaic period, free adult male citizens in most Greek communities were normally immune from that sort of treatment. Flogging was in fact typically a punishment reserved for slaves.¹⁴⁹ Its use against boys being trained by *paidotribai* and free men who broke rules in athletic competitions highlights the strong coercive element in sport. It is by no means coincidental that Xenophon, in discussing the ephors’ power to punish other elected magistrates they believed to be violating the law, compares the ephors to “tyrants and judges at athletic contests” (*Lac.* 8.4).

Less overt forms of coercion were also present in athletic training and competition. We are not sufficiently well informed to discuss the details of

145. Wilson 2000: 37.

146. Ath. 630e. On pyrrhic dancing, see Ceccarelli 1998 and Delavaud-Roux 1993. The Spartan habit of marching into battle slowly and rhythmically to the sound of *auloi* is also relevant (see, e.g., Thuc. 5.69–70), as is the use of *auloi* to provide rhythmic accompaniment at athletic competitions (on which, see Raschke 1985). One might also note the regular use of dance as a metaphor for war in ancient Greek sources (Lawler 1951: 385–86), starting with Hektor’s statement that “I know how to tread my measures on the grim floor of the war god” (*Il.* 7.241).

147. Cf. Ar. *Vesp.* 1060–61. In addition to imposing discipline on Spartiates, choral dance reinforced the norm of the subordination of the individual to the whole. The preceding discussion has pointed out that one of the effects of regimented movement in military drill is that “men tend to lose their individuality and are unified into a group under obedience to orders”; choral dance had much the same effect (Department of the Army 2003: Section 10.1). Cf. Peter Wilson’s observation that competitive dance in ancient Greece bore a close resemblance to a team sport (Wilson 2003: 164).

148. *Paidotribai* in Athenian vase-painting typically carry a forked stick that they are sometimes shown energetically using (see, e.g., British Museum E78 [1850.3–2.2]), and it seems unlikely that *paidotribai* in Sparta were any less quick to employ corporal punishment.

149. Crowther 2004: 141–60.

how Spartiates' athletic training was arranged, but there can be little doubt that it involved Foucauldian hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and examination. This is perhaps most obvious in the regular trials and contests to which Spartan boys were subjected. Athletics and choral dance thus shaped males in Sparta in many of the same ways they shaped young females—these activities helped inculcate a habit of compliant obedience and in so doing heightened adherence to social norms of all kinds.

Athletics was also coercive in a more specific sense in that the requirement that Spartiates from an early age regularly exercise nude in front of their peers created immense pressures to conform to the expectation that they look the part of the soldier. The effects of what Sartre called *le regard d'autrui* have been the subject of a great deal of discussion, particularly among French theorists inspired by Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*.¹⁵⁰ For our purposes, the most relevant treatment is that of Foucault, who observed that “the gaze that sees is a gaze that dominates” and who argued that exposure to the gaze of others, in the form of both actual observation and spectators conjured by the individual imagination, is an extraordinarily powerful means of coercing people to adhere to social norms.¹⁵¹

Foucault characterized the modern world as “the unimpeded empire of the gaze;”¹⁵² the same could justly be said of ancient Sparta. Vernant's comments on this aspect of the Spartan *diata* are illuminating:

We have said that each youth, during the *agôgê*, is continually under the gaze of others, spied on, controlled, judged, and punished. . . . There was no time or place at which the culprit would not encounter someone ready to reprimand or punish him. The eye of the city, multiplied, is constantly on him.¹⁵³

Clothes are a fundamental means of shielding oneself from observation. Sartre noted that “to put on clothes is to hide one's object-state; it is to claim the right of seeing without being seen; that is, to be pure subject.”¹⁵⁴ The playing out of the dynamic of clothing/nudity/observation for ancient Greeks is most evident in the meanings attached to *aidôs*. Douglas Cairns claimed with some reason that *aidôs* is “notoriously one of the most difficult of Greek words to translate.” Rather than attempt a specific definition, it may be more helpful to point out that *aidôs* had strong associations with “the notion of the ‘other’ or the audience,” “the eyes and visibility,” blushing, and “averting the gaze or seeking to hide oneself.”¹⁵⁵ Gloria Ferrari has argued that the visual analog of *aidôs* is “the enveloping

150. Jay 1993.

151. Foucault 1973 (1963): 39, Foucault 1977 (1975): 195–230, respectively.

152. Foucault 1973 (1963): 39.

153. Vernant 1991: 240.

154. Sartre 2003 (1943): 312.

155. Cairns 1993: 1, 14–15, respectively.

mantle, which encases the person like an impenetrable self, leaving only head and feet exposed.”¹⁵⁶

Spartiates were trained to be particularly sensitive to *aidôs*. We have already seen Xenophon claiming that, as a result of the constant threat of punishment, Sparta was a place in which “great respect stands beside great obedience” (πολλὴν μὲν αἰδῶ, πολλήν δὲ πειθῶ, *Lac.* 2.2). He shortly thereafter reiterates this point, stating that constant supervision and the attendant threat of punishment made Spartan *paides aidêmonesteroi* (2.10). In discussing the education of *paidiskoi* he claims that Lycurgus wanted them “to be imbued with a strong sense of respect” (αἰδεῖσθαι ἰσχυρῶς) and to that end ordered that *paidiskoi* always walk with their hands under their cloaks and their eyes fixed on the ground (3.4). In a different work Xenophon points out that a personification of *aidôs* was worshipped at Sparta (*Symp.* 8.35, cf. Paus. 3.20.10–11).¹⁵⁷ It is, therefore, fair to say that “the quality of prime importance in the Spartan system appears to be *aidôs*.”¹⁵⁸

The revealing athletic costumes of males and females in Sparta made painfully clear the extent of the adherence of individuals to the normative appearances attached to their expected social roles. Indeed, if *aidôs* could be visually manifested in an enveloping mantle, to be stripped of all clothing in front of one’s peers must have greatly intensified Spartiates’ already high level of sensitivity to the gaze of others. Exercising in a loincloth, the standard custom in Greece before the seventh century, left almost as much of the body exposed, but lacked the psychological impact of full nudity, as is perhaps evident from the Greeks’ use of the term *aidoia* for genitals. One might also note the ancient tradition that athletic nudity was a Spartan invention.¹⁵⁹

We can, therefore, think of athletic nudity as a means of requiring Spartiates to expose themselves completely to the gaze and judgment of others and thereby creating an almost overwhelming pressure to look the part of the soldier. As the stories recounted by Agatharchides and Plutarch indicate, a Spartiate who lacked an appropriate physique had literally no way to hide.

It is, moreover, likely that Spartiates saw a failure to maintain the expected physique as an indication of an individual’s failure to achieve an expected level of discipline and obedience. John Fiske, drawing on Bakhtin’s work on the grotesque body, has argued that “the appearance of the body encodes the extent of its discipline/docility, and thus makes it assessable.”¹⁶⁰ Exterior conformity to a physical ideal thus becomes an index of the extent of individual compliance with the demands of disciplinary regimes, and a flabby physique—epitomized by

156. Ferrari 1990: 186.

157. On the personification of *aidôs* at Sparta, see Richer 1999.

158. Humble 1999: 343.

159. On the date of the appearance of athletic nudity in ancient Greece, see Christesen 2007: 353–59 and McDonnell 1991. Most of the ancient sources on the emergence of athletic nudity can be found in Sweet 1987: 124–33.

160. Fiske 1993: 59.

Bakhtin's grotesque body—becomes grounds for suspicion of active resistance to the acceptance of discipline. One might note in this regard Vernant's argument that the masks found at the Artemis Orthia sanctuary, which were probably used in ritual dances, vividly express the dichotomy between an idealized and grotesque physical appearance, a dichotomy that would have had particular resonance in the highly disciplinary environments in which Spartiates circulated.¹⁶¹

The Spartan *diaita* was famous for the extent to which it produced disciplined, obedient male citizens. Plutarch observes that “Simonides applied to Sparta the epithet ‘man-taming’ (*damasimbroton*), because the effect of her customs was above all to make her citizens obedient and submissive to the laws . . .” (*Ages.* 1.2, trans. I. Scott-Kilvert). Athletics and choral dance were key elements in the Spartan *diaita*; they coerced Spartiates into a disciplined obedience and hence helped induce compliance with social norms. This connection between athletics, choral dance, and disciplined obedience is nicely illustrated in an exchange between Socrates and Pericles in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*. Pericles is worrying about the Athenians' inability to come up to Spartan standards in regard to respect for elders, physical fitness, obedience to rulers, and social harmony. Socrates replies:

No, no, Pericles, don't think the wickedness of the Athenians so utterly past remedy. Don't you see what good discipline they maintain in their fleets, how well they obey the umpires in athletic contests, how they take orders from the chorus-trainers as readily as any?

Mem. 3.5.18, trans. E. Marchant, slightly modified

11. MALE ATHLETICS AND SOCIAL ORDER IN SPARTA IN THE CLASSICAL PERIOD: CONSENSUS

This brings us to consensus, which should be taken to mean conscious, voluntary adherence to social norms. We have already seen that one of the more important ways of fostering consensus is the display of clearly defined ideals, which offer shared reference points that channel individuals' behavior. Athletics did just that. To quote John Hargreaves again, athletics “can . . . constitute regular public occasions for discourse on some of the basic themes of social life—success and failure, good and bad behavior, ambition and achievement, discipline and effort and so on.”¹⁶² As was the case with Spartan girls, athletics fostered consensus among Spartiates by presenting idealized models of and for individual behavior.

161. Vernant 1991: 226–38. On the masks from the Artemis Orthia sanctuary, see Carter 1987, Carter 1988, and Vernant 1991: 230–43.

162. Hargreaves 1986: 12. On public dance competitions as a means of fostering social cohesion in ancient Greece, see Wilson 2003.

Athletics also fostered consensus among Spartiates by helping build a sense of belonging to a unified group, which in turn encouraged voluntary adherence to norms that defined that group. Present-day understanding of the process of group formation and of the effects of group membership has been shaped by experiments carried out by Muzafer Sherif and Henri Tajfel, among others.¹⁶³ Tajfel and John Turner drew on those experiments in constructing what is now called social identity theory, which can be summarized as follows:

The core idea is that a self-inclusive social category (e.g., nationality, political affiliation, sports team) provides a category-congruent self-definition that constitutes an element of the self-concept. People have a repertoire of such discrete category memberships that vary in relative overall importance in the self-concept. The category is represented in the individual member's mind as a social identity that both describes and prescribes one's attributes as a group member.¹⁶⁴

Hence individuals construct their identities around membership in particular groups and voluntarily shape their behavior to accord with norms shared by the members of those groups.

The capacity of athletics to act as a unifying force that helped construct a sense of group identity among Spartiates had to do with the simple fact that, with the exception of a few, unusually talented individuals who went to Olympia, Spartiates played sports with no one but other Spartiates. Playing sports together from an early age forged bonds among Spartiates. Xenophon's comments on the exclusion of cowards from athletics speak to the extent to which athletics was a means of bringing Spartiates together—and of excluding those who failed to live up to social norms.

Another factor which made athletics into a unifying force that bound Spartiates together was athletic nudity. Sociologists and social psychologists who study group formation have found that a sense of belonging to a group is frequently linked to clothing. For example, Stephen Worchel and his colleagues argue that group formation is a cyclical process, the first stage of which they label "group identification" and describe as follows:

The group focuses on establishing clear boundaries. . . . The group avoids accepting new members. There are strong pressures for conformity and members often adopt a group uniform. Groupthink . . . is common. Dissenters are punished and/or rejected. The norm of equality is adopted and little distinction is made between members.¹⁶⁵

163. Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, and Sherif 1961, Tajfel 1981.

164. Hogg 1996: 66–67.

165. Worchel and Coutant 2001: 466. The fact that athletic nudity needs to be viewed from the perspectives of both coercion and consensus is an indication of the complexity of this practice.

Athletic nudity was in effect a uniform that was regularly “worn” only by Spartiates and thus helped construct a strong sense of group identity. Public nudity was acceptable in a very limited number of contexts in ancient Greece.¹⁶⁶ As Ephraim David has pointed out, “for all its importance, the practice of nudity in Sparta should be kept in its proper perspective: this was not a nudist society. In most public contexts the Spartans, like the other Greeks, were dressed and . . . they were extremely careful about their dress.”¹⁶⁷ The habit of playing sports in the nude thus set Spartiates apart from all the other members of their community and that in turn heightened the sense of belonging to a specific group.

In addition to binding Spartiates together, athletic nudity strongly reinforced the egalitarian and meritocratic relationships that ideally existed between and among all *homoioi*. Clothing is one of the most powerful means of signaling status. During the Archaic period rich men in many places in Greece pursued social status through conspicuous consumption in the form of elaborate clothes and jewelry. As Thucydides makes clear, socio-political changes in Sparta were reflected in dress habits:

The Spartans were the first to adopt the moderate manner of dressing that is now the standard custom, and with respect to all other things the richer citizens conducted themselves in a fashion that as much as possible put them into an equal position with the general populace. The Spartans were the first to strip naked and to disrobe openly and anoint themselves with oil after exercising in the nude.

Thuc. 1.6, trans. P. Christesen, cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1294b27–28

Thucydides indicates that the introduction of athletic nudity was connected to the changes that made the Spartan *politeia* more inclusive and egalitarian. Immediately after commenting that it was in Sparta that the rich first adopted a simple lifestyle, he observes that the Spartans were the first to play sports in the nude. Thucydides strongly implies, though he does not explicitly claim, that the two developments were part of the same process and that playing sports in the nude helped reduce social inequalities. Xenophon echoes this sentiment in discussing the unimportance of wealth in Sparta; he claims that Spartiates “adorn themselves not with costly dress but with the fine condition of their bodies” (*Lac.*

166. Bonfante 1989.

167. David 2010: 152. David discusses Spartan athletic nudity in some detail and emphasizes the importance of its leveling and integrative effects. For a similar interpretation of the simpler clothing styles that came into fashion in Athens in the Classical period, see Geddes 1987. David also points out that public nudity was in most instances in Sparta humiliating and was used as a form of social exclusion (149–52). See, for instance, Plut. *Lyc.* 15.2. It seems that nudity was, relatively speaking, more prevalent in Sparta than many other Greek communities. This has in the past been explained as a reflection of Dorian permissiveness as opposed to Ionian prudery (Müller 1906: 91–95), but it seems more likely that it was a reflection of the fact that Sparta was an unusually ritualized environment.

7.3). Thucydides' interpretive instincts were on this point undoubtedly sound; it is a commonplace in present-day sociology that "the wearing of special clothing, or little clothing at all, tends to mask social differences and buttresses the impression of harmony and lack of social division."¹⁶⁸

Athletics thus contributed meaningfully to binding Spartiates tightly together and thereby promoted consensus. It presented idealized models of and for individual behavior and was a shared activity that helped create a sense of group identity among Spartiates. That sense of group identity was heightened by the practice of athletic nudity, which set Spartiates apart from all the other members of their community while also reinforcing the notion of all Spartiates being *homoioi*, downplaying wealth as a source of status, and helping create a meritocracy based on maintaining a physique proper for a soldier. The strong sense of belonging to a clearly defined and unified group offered powerful encouragement to Spartiates to comply voluntarily with shared norms and in that way fostered consensus that helped sustain social order in Sparta.¹⁶⁹

12. CONCLUSION

As the final element in discussing Spartiates' involvement with athletics, it is necessary to touch briefly on empowerment. It is no doubt evident at this point that the Spartan system placed a great deal of emphasis on order and that athletics played a key role in maintaining social order at Sparta. However, it also helped Spartiates learn to be autonomous individuals. As we would expect, athletics did so in part by producing strong, tough, physically self-confident individuals. But that was far from the only way athletics cultivated autonomy. Spartiates led an unusually regimented life in which they were regularly encouraged or compelled to be obedient members of a group. Athletics provided a setting in which individuals could act purely for themselves, openly and aggressively, in their own immediate interest. For Spartiates, their athletic activity was a prime opportunity for self-expression that had the added benefit of allowing them to pursue *timê* that elevated their personal standing in the community. The role of sport in fostering both social control and individual empowerment is nicely encapsulated in Michael Novak's comment that "in sports, law was born and also liberty, and the nexus of their interrelation."¹⁷⁰

We can conclude by returning whence we began, with Xenophon's observation that cowards in Sparta were rejected as wrestling partners, not selected

168. Hargreaves 1986: 169.

169. It is likely that many of the same processes discussed here also promoted consensus among unmarried Spartan girls, who probably danced and played sports primarily with other unmarried Spartan girls while wearing an unusual form of dress that set them apart from other members of the community. However, the evidence for Spartan female athletics is too exiguous to make definitive statements along those lines.

170. Novak 1988: 43.

as members of teams for ball games, and were given the least honorable places in choruses. In light of the preceding discussion, we can see that Xenophon's observation speaks to a more general phenomenon, the use of athletics as a mechanism of social control in Sparta. Athletics induced both Spartiates and girls from Spartan families to adhere to social norms. It inculcated compliance with social norms in which females were expected to be beautiful, compliant objects of male desire. It also helped ensure that Spartiates conformed to social norms that valorized meritocratic status competition, playing the part of the soldier, and the subordination of the individual to the group. If athletics, by providing opportunities to realize their physical potential and to exert power over others, helped individuals develop a sense of empowerment, its liberating qualities were always outweighed by its capacity for shaping behavior to conform with social norms.

This may seem an unduly pessimistic reading of athletics. In part that may be because there is a tendency, particularly in the United States, to celebrate participation in sport as a route to a deeper and truer democracy.¹⁷¹ Another factor may be a usually unspoken assumption that liberation from the effects of the operation of power is possible. That, however, is an assumption that merits careful examination. Foucault was certainly dubious about its veracity. He argued that "it seems to me that power *is* 'always already there,' that one is never 'outside' it, that there are no 'margins' for those who break with the system to gambol in."¹⁷² Still another issue to take into account is that adherence to social norms can produce individuals with knowledge and expertise that they can use for their own ends. Foucault repeatedly emphasized the productive aspects of power, and Anthony Giddens has written at length about individuals using social structures as enabling mechanisms.¹⁷³

Yet the biggest single factor may be that no consideration has been given here to how athletics was a site of resistance to pressures to comply with social norms. As Foucault pointed out, the application of disciplinary regimes inevitably generates opposition.¹⁷⁴ If Sparta was indeed what it appears to have been, a regimented society in which athletics was a mechanism for imposing social control on individuals, then in at least some cases it must also have become a means for resisting social control.¹⁷⁵

Unfortunately it is not apparent that the extant sources, which project an image of a deeply orderly Sparta, make it possible to address that subject in detail.

Dartmouth College
paul.christesen@dartmouth.edu

171. See the discussion in chapter 3 of Christesen 2012b.

172. Foucault 1980: 141. It is important to note that in his later work Foucault made more allowance for the possibility of individual self-fashioning.

173. See, for instance, Foucault 1980: 119, Giddens 1984: 162–79 and *passim*.

174. Foucault 1980: 56.

175. For some insightful reflections on athletics as a means of resistance to social control, see Markula and Pringle 2006: 135–212.

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Fig. 1: Bronze mirror support, possibly made in Sparta probably showing nude female dancer or athlete (carries cymbals, wearing sickle or strigil on baldric) c. 540-530, 21.9 cm high, found at Curium in Cyprus. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cesnola Collection. Purchased by subscription, 1874-76 (74.51.5680).



Fig. 2: Bronze statuette, possibly made in Sparta, showing female runner or dancer c. 520-500, 11.4 cm high, found at Prizren in Serbia. British Museum GR 1876.5-10.1 (Bronze 208).