

Athletic “Womanhood”: Exploring Sources for Female Sport in Victorian and Edwardian England

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In her 1984 review essay on the scholarship of American women's sport history, Nancy Struna notes that we still know relatively little about what sportswomen actually did. She proceeds to argue that if we are to push back the boundaries of our knowledge we must seek out fresh source material. These comments are equally applicable to the scholarship on the history of British women's sport. Research by several scholars illustrates how educators, the medical profession, and various social commentators of the nineteenth century viewed the issue of women and sport, and, thanks to the excellent work of Kathleen McCrone, there exists a very clear picture of developments within private schools and women's colleges in Victorian and Edwardian England.¹

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1. Nancy L. Struna, "Beyond Mapping Experience: The Need for Understanding in the History of American Women's Sport," *Journal of Sport History* 11 (Spring 1984): 120-33. Considerably more work has been done on the history of American women. For examples, see Roberta J. Park, "'Embodied Selves': The Rise and Development of Concern for Physical Education, Active Games and Recreation for American Women, 1770-1865," *Journal of Sport History* 5 (Summer 1978): 5-41; Patricia Vertinsky, "God, Science and the Marketplace: The Bases for Exercise Prescription for Females in Nineteenth-Century North America," *Canadian Journal of the History of Sport* 17 (May 1986): 38-45; Linda J. Borish, "The Robust Woman and the Muscular Christian: Catharine Beecher, Thomas Higginson and their Vision of American Society, Health and Physical Activities," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 4 (1987): 139-54; Jan Todd, "Bernarr Macfadden: Reformer of Feminine Form," *Journal of Sport History* 14 (1987): 61-74. Much of this literature focuses upon the prescriptions that were made concerning women's health and physical activity. For examples of the rather cursory treatment of women in early studies of British sport and leisure, see Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978); Hugh Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution c.1780-c.1880* (London: Groom Helm, 1980); James Walvin, *Leisure and Society, 1830-1950* (London: Longman, 1978); H. E. Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976). For more extensive accounts, especially of developments in schools and women's colleges, see Paul Atkinson, "Fitness, Feminism and Schooling," in *The Nineteenth-Century Woman: Her Cultural and Physical World*, ed. Sarah Delamont and Lorna Duffin (London: Groom Helm, 1978), 92-133; Kathleen E. McCrone, "Play Up! Play Up! And Play the Game! Sport at the Late Victorian Girls' Public School," *Journal of British Studies* 23 (1984): 106-34; idem., "The 'Lady Blue': Sport at the Oxbridge Women's Colleges from their Foundation to 1914," *British Journal of Sports History* 3 (1986): 191-215; Sheila Fletcher, *Women First: The Female Tradition in English Physical Education, 1880-1980* (London: Athlone Press, 1984). For a more general treatment, see Jennifer A. Hargreaves, "'Playing Like Gentlemen While Behaving Like Ladies': Contradictory Features of the Formative Years of Women's Sport," *British Journal of Sports History* 2 (1985): 40-52; Roberta J. Park, "Sport, Gender and Society in a Transatlantic

However, our comprehension of the nature and extent of female sporting activity outside these institutions remains quite limited. One task confronting historians is to uncover sources which will enable them to move beyond the prescriptive literature and begin to establish a better understanding of what women's sport actually encompassed. We need to know what women did, how they felt about themselves and their experiences, and how far sport contributed to the reshaping of the image of women in this critical period. Autobiographies, memoirs, diaries, letters, and organisational records may furnish this kind of information, but it is the usefulness of the female periodical press which I will address in this essay.

What follows is an account of a sampling of women's sport as it was reported in the pages of one magazine, *Womanhood*, which was published from 1898 to about 1907. At sixpence per monthly issue, this was one of the more expensive female journals on the market and regular literary contributions from members of the British and European aristocracy gave the publication a decidedly exclusive air. The whole tone of the magazine suggests that it was designed to cater to the new generation of college educated, upper and middle class women whose interests ranged from art and literature to social philanthropy, suffragism, and sport. *Womanhood* offers some insight into the actual sporting practice of this group and the evidence presented here, while exploratory in nature, supports the notion that the Victorian and Edwardian sportswoman was a far more dynamic and athletic figure than many of her contemporaries and some present writers would allow. As David Rubinstein argues, what was most significant about this period was not that there were numerous restrictions placed upon women's participation in sport, but that some women ignored these restrictions and, in doing so, challenged the dominant attitudes and beliefs of the nineteenth century.²

I

Historians are revising their interpretations of the female experience of industrialisation. In the earlier literature it was suggested that the most important consequence for women of the emergence of an industrial, capitalist society was their consignment to the private, domestic sphere. Scholars such as Harold Perkin argue that by the 1830s, the ideal woman of the middle and upper classes was almost completely afunctional and non-productive. The notion of "the 'perfect lady' . . . the completely leisured, completely ornamental, completely

Victorian Perspective," *ibid.*, 5-27. See also David Rubinstein, "Cycling in the 1890s." *Victorian Studies* 21 (1977): 47-71. Mangan and Park's recent collection of essays reflects the current state of the scholarship on women's sport history, see J. A. Mangan and Roberta J. Park, eds., *From 'Fair Sex' to Feminism: Sport and the Socialization of Women in the Industrial and Post-industrial Eras* (London: Frank Cass, 1987).

2. The average price of twenty-three general interest women's magazines for the year 1898 was twopence a month. Sixpence marked the upper end of the range and one penny the lower. Fashion journals, which often included colour plates, tended to be more expensive, about sevenpence on average. These figures are based on a list of publications in *The Englishwoman's Yearbook and Directory*, 1898 (London: Hatchards, 1898), pp. 98-101; David Rubinstein, *Before the Suffragettes: Women's Emancipation in the 1890s* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester, 1986), p. 211.

helpless and dependant . . . middle-class wife or daughter” was certainly a powerful stereotype which pervaded much of the contemporary literature and its prevalence could be explained as a consequence of the far-reaching transformations which English society faced at this time. During an age of sweeping change, when old certainties and beliefs were shaken, men looked to the institution of the family as a guardian against the chaos and turmoil of social upheaval and, within its blessed confines, they enshrined the perfect woman: “innocent, pure, gentle and self-sacrificing.” But, more recent scholars argue that this mid-Victorian ideal was probably far removed from the social, economic, and spiritual reality of most women, something which is suggested by the intense debate on the “woman question” which was evidenced throughout the nineteenth century and which reached a peak with the emergence of the largely mythical New Woman in the 1890s.³ The antithesis of the “perfect lady,” the New Woman moved to centrestage of public debate in the closing years of the nineteenth century and, in her radical form, she challenged the most basic social institutions and beliefs, including marriage. Carving out a new path for women to follow, one which did not lead inevitably to a husband and children, independent women forced the re-conceptualisation of society’s view of womanhood. A critical and constitutive element of this emergent model was a newly defined sense of female physicality: “It was pointed out that women were likely to remain the weaker sex as long as they were encased in whalebone and confined their physical activity to decorous movements of the ballroom, and the ‘new doctrine of hygiene’ as it was coyly termed advocated sports for women and Rational Dress.”⁴

There were close ties between the advocacy of physical activity for women and developments within the educational system, for reformers such as Frances Mary Buss and Dorothea Beale clearly recognised the connection between mental and physical development. By the late 1880s, an organised and com-

3. Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 9, 22, 348-53. For an example of the contemporary didactic literature on women’s roles and duties, see Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Mothers of England* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1844). One of the most famous contributions to the debate of the “woman question” was Eliza Lynn Linton’s article “The Girl of the Period,” *Saturday Review*, March 14, 1868. For an account of the contention which this provoked, see Nana Rhinehart, “‘The Girl of the Period’ Controversy,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 13 (1980): 3-9; and, for a summary of two of the most important documents on this issue, see Kate Millett, “The Debate over Women: Ruskin vs. Mill,” in *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1972), pp. 121-39. For the earlier interpretation of the effect of industrialisation upon middle class women, see Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), pp. 158-60; Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), pp. 4-7. For revisionist scholarship on Victorian women, see Patricia Branca, *Silent Sisterhood: Middle Class Women in the Victorian Home* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Carnegie-Mellon University Press, 1975); F. B. Smith, “Sexuality in Britain, 1800-1900: Some Suggested Revisions,” in *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), pp. 182-98; M. Jeanne Peterson, “No Angels in the House: The Victorian Myth and the Paget Women,” *American Historical Review* 89 (1984): 677-708. For contrasting pictures of “woman’s sphere” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Joan M. Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women, 1750-1850* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986); Bonnie J. Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class: The Bourgeoises of Northern France in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1981).

4. The quotation is from Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1978), p. 2. This, together with Lloyd Fernando, *‘New Women’ in the Late Victorian Novel* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977) and Carol A. Serf, “Dracula: Stoker’s Response to the New Woman,” *Victorian Studies* 26 (1982): 33-49, explores the literary treatment of the New Woman.

prehensive system of physical education was a central component of the curriculum in the girls' public schools, and by the late 1890s, they had also embraced competitive sports and games. In the broader sphere, upper and middle class women became increasingly involved in a variety of recreations; croquet in the 1860s, lawn tennis in the 1870s and 1880s and cycling in the 1890s. This expansion took place in a climate of concerned debate, one of the most problematic issues of which was the effect of physical activity upon women's femininity. An important feature of the explosion of interest in institutionalised sport and games in the nineteenth century was the cultish reverence of the concept of manliness. In such a schema, as McCrone argues, athleticism and true womanhood were hardly harmonious and the sporting woman represented an inherent contradiction which was partly resolved by the acceptance and reinforcement of conservative notions of appropriately ladylike behaviour. In order that she might make some inroads into the largely male-defined and male-dominated world of sport, the late Victorian and Edwardian sportswoman had to project an image of moderation and becoming femininity, and her sporting experience was consequently, at one and the same time, a liberating and constraining one. Jennifer Hargreaves sums up the paradox: "Patriarchal ideology was the most consistent and sustaining set of values which women learnt to accommodate to . . . In order to achieve social approval for their involvement in sport, women had to demonstrate that femininity and more active participation in physical activity were not incompatible."⁵

II

In the second half of the nineteenth century there was a great expansion in the readership of the periodical and newspaper press. Women proved to be an important sector of this growing market and enterprising publishers eagerly sought to provide for the demand, launching forty-eight new journals for women between about 1880 and 1900 alone.⁶ Among these sometimes fleeting publications was *Womanhood*, a monthly magazine of about fifty pages. In the first issue, the editor, Mrs. Ada S. Ballin declared her agenda for the journal:

I intend to devote the pages of *Womanhood* to subjects which appeal more especially to intellectual and highly educated women; and to supply them with a more solid literary diet than other papers offer. At the same time, the political interests of women will be by no means neglected. One of the most important features will be on hygiene, personal health and beauty culture . . . am the authority in the latter department.⁷

5. Dorothea Beale, Lucy H. M. Soulsby, and Jane Frances Dove, *Work and Play in Girls' Schools* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1898); Sam A. Burstall and M. A. Douglas, eds., *Public Schools for Girls* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1911); Sara A. Burstall, *English High Schools for Girls* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1907); McCrone, "'Play Up!'", p. 131; Hargreaves, "'Playing,'" p. 48. The best account of the institutionalisation of the athletic cult is J. A. Mangan's *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

6. Cynthia L. White, *Women's Magazines, 1693-1968* (London: Michael Joseph, 1970), pp. 58, 69, 70.

7. *Womanhood* 1 (December 1898): iii.

Ada Ballin was one of a small but significant group of women who entered into non-traditional occupations in the late nineteenth century. A professional journalist and published author, she was married but chose to work under her single name, an indication of her feminist inclinations. Besides *Womanhood*, she edited two other publications, *Baby: The Mother's Magazine*, and *Playtime*, a children's magazine. She also wrote a detailed and comprehensive manual advising middle class women on how to prepare for, and cope with, childbirth and motherhood. *Womanhood's* primary focus was literature, science, health and beauty care, and it was supportive of female suffragism. It also carried a significant amount of information on women's sport. Ada Ballin believed wholeheartedly in the importance of "rational physical training" as a corrective to female ailments which she felt stemmed from a sedentary lifestyle. In the debate which raged over women's sport during this period, she placed herself on the opposite side to her friend, Dr. Arabella Kenealy, an outspoken critic of female athleticism. Ballin used her editorial powers to convey a more positive image of women's athletics.* From the second issue of January, 1899, *Womanhood* included a two to four page section entitled "Womens Sports" [sic] which consisted of announcements of upcoming events and reports of the previous month's round of sport. While there were occasional commentaries and critiques, for the most part the magazine simply reported, often in only three or four brief sentences, what upper and middle class sportswomen were doing. They are revealed, in its pages, as excelling and revelling in the performance of strenuous, competitive physical activities.

It is quite easy to gauge one aspect of the extent of women's involvement in sport in this period. A simple count of every issue of *Womanhood* showed that they were active participants in almost thirty different sports: individual sports, ranging from the fine motor skills of archery to the gross bodily skills of lawn tennis and swimming; the 'field sports' of hunting, shooting, and angling; and team sports such as field hockey and water polo. Given the minimal attention paid to women in most historical studies of sport of this period, this is a surprisingly wide range of activity. But we can go further than this and begin to qualify Hargreaves' conclusion that "women's participatory role in conspicuous recreation . . . [games such as lawn tennis and croquet] embodied characteristics of passivity rather than activity, subordination rather than ascendancy." There is clear evidence in *Womanhood* to suggest that there was rather more to the Victorian and Edwardian sportswoman than this, for most of the activities alluded to above were competitive, not purely social or recreational. The only exceptions were field sports such as foxhunting, otterhunting, and angling, all

8. Ada S. Ballin, *From Cradle to School: A Book For Mothers* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., n. d.); Arabella Kenealy, "Woman as an Athlete," *Nineteenth Century* 45 (April 1899): 635-45; idem, "Woman as an Athlete: A Rejoinder," *ibid.*, (June 1899): 915-29. For a discussion of these articles, see Fletcher, *Women First* pp. 25-26, 27, 29; Ada Ballin, "Physical Health and Culture," *Womanhood* 13 (December 1904): 39; James P. Danky, *Women's Periodicals and Newspapers from the 18th Century to 1981: A Union List of the Holdings of Madison, Wisconsin Libraries* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982), p. 227. It should be emphasised that general guides to the periodical literature usually do not document whether a magazine or newspaper contains information on women's sport. Danky's work gave no indication that *Womanhood* included this kind of material.

of which demanded, nonetheless, varying degrees of stamina, strength, or skill. It is to this group of activities that I will turn first in order to consider the question of the nature of women's sporting involvement.⁹

While scholars have explored the transformation of nineteenth-century sports as a consequence of industrialisation, their focus has been mainly upon the development of modern team games such as football. The traditional field sports of hunting, shooting and fishing, "the representative sports of Great Britain" have been largely overlooked, yet they continued to hold an unassailable position in the programme of country pursuits of the Victorian and Edwardian upper classes. One contemporary assessment of hunting was that it had "about as many followers among the best class as football or cricket." On estates throughout the United Kingdom, beginning with the opening of the grouse season on August 12th and continuing into late autumn and winter with partridge shooting and foxhunting, the upper classes met in a social and sporting round, the exclusivity of which was ensured by formalised rituals and relationships. Preeminent among these activities was foxhunting, one of the few sports for which there seems to have been no rigidly prescriptive code limiting women's participation. In fact, some women embraced the sport with a zest which was evidently not considered inappropriate. This may be explained in part by the extreme social exclusivity which attended to the leaders of the foxhunting set. Members of the aristocracy and the upper middle classes were probably sufficiently secure in their status to ignore, to some extent, more bourgeoisie notions of respectability.¹⁰

Foxhunting in the form which it is known today did not develop until the middle of the eighteenth century. While there is evidence that some women were involved in the sport in its early days (the Marchioness of Salisbury was "master" of the prestigious Hatfield Hunt from 1775 to 1819), it was not until the 1850s that it became generally acceptable for women to hunt. It is impossible to give an accurate figure for the numbers of women who participated in the nineteenth century, estimates of the size and composition of hunting fields are simply that. According to one enthusiast, 200 riders was considered a poor turn out, while few meets attracted less than 100 men and women. A figure of thirty women is given in an account of the Tipperary Hunt in the 1902 season, but the overall evidence is very impressionistic, such as reports that a good many women attended the thrice weekly meetings of the Dartmoor Pack. Caspar Whitney, an American visitor, judged that there were a considerable number of women in the saddle at foxhunting meets in England and Ireland, but the assessment of this keen propagandist of British upper class sport should

9. The sports were: angling, foot beagling, foxhunting, hare coursing, otterhunting, shooting, staghunting; archery, badminton, bob-sleighbing, croquet, cycling, diving, driving, fencing, golf, ice skating, kennel, lawn bowling, ping pang, punting, rowing, skiing, swimming, tennis, yachting; field hockey, water polo. Hargreaves, "Playing," p. 43.

10. D. Reid, "Leisure and Recreation," *History* 65 (1980): 52-57; Peter Bartzip, "Food for the Body and Food for the Mind: the Regulation of Freshwater fisheries in the 1870s." *Victorian Studies* 28 (1985): 295; *The Marquis of Granby*, "Nature and Sport," *Womanhood* 14 (November 1905): 232; Caspar W. Whitney, *A Sparring Pilgrimage* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1895). pp. 26-29; Leonore Davidoff, *The Best Circles* (London: Groom Helm, 1963), pp. 15, 28-29.

probably be accepted with some reservation. Despite the difficulty of quantification, by the last two decades of the nineteenth century the sport had "become such a recognised part of the amusements of a winter residence in the country, that no apology for it is required," whereas thirty years previously "in all England not more than half-a-dozen ladies went out with the hounds for it was considered fast and unusual."¹¹

There was more diversity of opinion on the nature of women's participation in the hunt, and most significantly, there was clearly a gap between prescribed and actual behaviour. To the more conservative minded, hunting was the ideal pastime in which a gentleman could test his mettle and emerge morally and physically stronger. Meanwhile, the woman riding by his side dispensed "tact, kindness . . . courtesy and politeness," features which Lady Greville considered to be part of the "ideal lady's nature." Alluding to this vision of gentle English womanhood, another contemporary writer wondered "who could resist these charming girls, so dashing and frank, yet so pretty and modest and feminine?" These views were totally in keeping with the notion of the passive woman, the embodiment of purity and spirituality who was a natural complement to the baser physicality of man and who was fully endorsed by apologists for a constrained sphere of action for women. But such one-dimensional figures, while fitting neatly into the stereotypical niche which the prescriptive literature carved out, were at variance with the far more substantial figures depicted in actual accounts of Victorian and Edwardian hunting.¹²

Some women were dashing, daring followers of the hunt. A swift gallop across rough, broken ground intersected by rails, fences, and ditches was a dangerous if exciting enterprise and demanded far more sturdy qualities than kindness, courtesy and politeness: "courage, and quick decision, and good judgement," claimed one young huntress. The Duchess of Sutherland and the Honourable Violet Monckton exemplified these sterling qualities, displaying "very great courage" and accomplishment in potentially serious falls in the 1902 season, while the Duchess of Hamilton's adroitness in a similar situation was judged to form a "striking feature of that mastery, especially in readiness of resource, so well marking the talented horsewoman." Stamina, strength, skill and courage were all called forth in the high speed chases which were a feature of the hunt, and women were often noted as being at the fore in these. Lady Greenall was applauded for holding the leading position in a "smart" run of the Belvoir over a good deal of difficult terrain in a meeting during the 1902 season while, in the same field, one woman rode so recklessly in negotiating a fence that her valuable hunter had to be destroyed. Accounts of other meets illustrate

11. Whitney, *Pilgrimage*, pp. 26, 40; David C. Itzkowit, *Peculiar Privilege: A Social History of English Foxhunting 1713-1885* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester, 1977), pp 55-57; Shirley M. Reekie, "A History of Sport and Physical Recreation for Women in Great Britam, 1700-1850" (Ph. D. diss., Ohio State University, 1982), pp. 105, 107; *Womanhood* 3 (February 1900): 205; 7 (January 1902): 143; 9 (December 1902): 51; 9 (January 1903): 132. The quotations are from "Fox Hunting for Ladies." *The Ladles Edinburgh Magazine* 5 (February 1879): 76.

12. Lady Greville, ed., *Ladies in the Field: Skerches of Sport* (London: Ward & Downey, 1894), p. iv, quoted in Hargreaves, "'Playing,'" p. 47; "Fox-Hunting for Ladies," p. 74.

that women also tempered their daring with skill: in a run of the Pytchley H. C. “a good deal of the land covered . . . was well calculated to bring out riding qualities in a very varied way . . . the ladies taking part . . . were conspicuous by way of taking the lead in negotiating the many pitfalls before them, and in no case with the result of an empty saddle.” There are also several accounts of women achieving the honour of being the first to ride in at the death of the fox, something which seems not to have offended their supposedly more delicate sensibilities. In a 1900 meeting of the Dartmoor Pack, the brush was awarded to a Miss Gladys Bulteel, of whom it was noted that her pony “was piloted with exceptional skill,” while in a previous month’s run of the same pack, a Miss Dorothy Bainbridge claimed the coveted trophy. None of this is to suggest that women participated in equal numbers or on equal terms with men; indeed, of the 270 packs in the United Kingdom in 1900, only one bore the name of a woman. It does suggest, however, that the ideological constraints of high Victorianism may have been neither all-pervasive nor fully accepted, and it certainly allows us to question the notion that women’s role in the hunting field was merely that of a refining embellishment. Rather, it is clear that some women were active, enthusiastic, and skillful participants who were drawn to the sport by “the enjoyment, the wholesomeness, even the nerve-bracing dash of danger.”¹³

This picture of dynamic women engaged in the wholehearted enjoyment of a vigorous sport is replicated in accounts of otterhunting. The more novel form of the chase was undertaken in the summer months when the streams and rivers ran low, and it seems to have been particularly popular with women at the turn of the century. A noteworthy feature of the sport was that the hunt was followed on foot rather than on horseback, and accounts of otters being chivvied and chased for anywhere from two and a half to eight and a half hours belie any notions of physical frailty or weakness on the part of the sport’s adherents. Indeed, the physical component seems to have added to the appeal of the activity: “[T]o lovers of active exercise on foot who care to cover not a little rough country . . . otterhunting has a zest quite its own.” In accounts such as that of a meeting of the Cheriton Pack in 1905, the quite considerable numbers of women were often remarked upon: “many ladies figured in the muster, and their presence set a distinctly good example to many of the men: for when the otter was found they did not hesitate to go at once into deep water and guard the stickle.” As with foxhunting, women often claimed the spoils of the chase. A meeting in September, 1902 opened at 3:30 a.m. and ended late in the afternoon with the presentation of the mask of a fifteen pound otter to a Mrs. Whymer and the rudder to a Mrs. Last. In two days of sport with the

13. “Fox-Hunting for Ladies,” pp. 75-76, 78; *Womanhood* 7 (April 1902): 459; 15 (January 1906): 176; 11 (February 1904): 163; 9 (December 1902): 51; 3 (February 1900): 205; 3 (March 1900): 274; 3 (January 1900): 117. Female masters of foxhounds were unusual. By 1906, there were two others but neither of them controlled the more prestigious English hunts. Mrs. T. Hughes of Neuadd Fawr, Lampeter, South Wales took over after her husband’s death in 1902, and Miss E. Somerville of the West Carbery Foxhounds, Skibbereen, County Cork, Ireland assumed mastership from her brother in 1903. Female masters of harriers were more common, numbering eight in the 1906 season. *The English woman’s Year Book and Directory*, 1906, p. 171.

King's otterhounds in October the previous year, women claimed seven of the ten trophies. Again, it must be stated that no claims are being made for a preponderance of women in this or other field sports, nor are any generalisations being extended to the behaviour of other groups of women; the evidence does not allow that. It does permit, however, a re-assessment of sporting women, and it leads to the conclusion that denunciations such as the following must have been made in response to actual practices: "Unlimited indulgence in violent, outdoor sports, cricket, bicycling, beagling, otter-hunting . . . cannot but have an unwomanly effect on a young girl's mind, no less on her appearance . . . let young girls ride, skate, dance and play lawn tennis and other games in moderation, but let them leave field sports to those for whom they were intended—men."¹⁴

Hargreaves argues that the turn-of-the-century sportswoman was a submissive creature who avoided over-exertion and bodily display, and who "represented the embellishment of man with no natural, organic connection to physical action of the sort that epitomises sport as we know it today." This assessment, shaped by late twentieth-century conceptions of both women and sport, is not entirely accurate. In examining a range of individual sports it becomes clear that while passivity and restraint may have been proffered as the correct characteristics for female participation in sport, they were not its sole features. In a host of activities which included swimming, croquet, archery, rowing, bobsleighting, and mountain climbing, women competed, excelled, and exhilarated in the sensuality of physical exertion and the mastery of bodily skill.¹⁵

Swimming illustrates some of the most powerful societal checks applied to the development of women's sport. According to one scholar, concerns with modesty and morality led to the strict segregation of the sexes in swimming pools and at the seaside as late as the 1920s. Furthermore, clothing is judged to have been deliberately shapeless and unprovocative, hiding the form and mitigating against any suggestion of eroticism. However, there was no universal acceptance of such notions. During the early part of 1901, the readership of *Womanhood* was invited to join in a debate on the propriety of mixed sea bathing and the letters written in response reveal that the consensus among them was that there was no good reason for the enforced separation of the sexes and that, indeed, there were very good reasons for doing away with the practice. As one correspondent commented: "I can see no objection to ladies and gentlemen bathing together . . . It is natural that they should do so; also it is safer. I cannot imagine when or why there came to be a necessity for separate bathing places." Opinion is one thing, practice may be very different. The town of Salisbury had a swimming club which adhered to a policy of "ladies only" competition but there were signs that mixed recreational bathing, in the sea at least, had become

14. *Womanhood* 6 (July 1901): 119; 14 (August 1905): 49; 6 (October 1901): 357; 8 (September 1902): 340, *Badminton Magazine*, 1900, quoted in B. Dobbs, *Edwardians at Play* (London: Pelham Books, 1973), p. 80; *The Englishwoman's Year Book and Directory*, 1904, p. 160.

15. Hargreaves, "Playing," p. 43.

increasingly acceptable. In an 1899 article on the topic, Ada Ballin was pleased to note “that at Cromer and Felixstowe during the last year or two, the Continental fashion of allowing ladies and gentlemen to bathe together has been adopted,” and that by this date, mixed bathing was beginning to be pretty much an accepted feature at some English seaside resorts. The question also was broached in an interview with a member of the Portsmouth Ladies’ Swimming Club who opined: “I would rather swim where ladies only were admitted, though I have invariably swam before the opposite sex, but it was unavoidable. I know several ladies of our swimming club [500-600 members] would have entered for races of the different swimming clubs if such events were held before ladies only.”¹⁶

This young woman’s unease at finding herself swimming before men at some venues was evidently not sufficient to prevent her from participating in competitions. Beginning in the mid-1890s, she entered races in Bournemouth, Exeter, Salisbury, Southsea, Brighton, Worthing, Portsmouth, and London, quite an extensive circuit and one which indicates that there were sufficient numbers of competitive female swimmers to warrant its existence. While there was some opposition to such female athleticism, influential members of society began to recognise it as a worthwhile endeavour. The Duke and Duchess of Connaught encouraged the women of the south coast in their “healthful and useful accomplishment” by presenting a silver trophy for the ladies’ open sea championship of the Portsmouth Swimming Club. In 1901, the national governing body, the Amateur Swimming Association, also acknowledged the prevalence of competitive swimming among women when it presented a perpetual silver vase to the Ravensbourne (London) Swimming Club, to be competed for annually in different parts of the country by female amateurs over a distance of 100 yards. The competition was established as a direct response to “the increasing number of lady swimmers and the great interest in the art generally.”¹⁷

There seems to have been a continuous interplay between this kind of sporting practice and contemporary opinion on the question of the appropriate extent and vigour of women’s participation. In November of 1901, *Womanhood* acknowledged the “remarkable feat” of Miss Florence Harker of the Kingston Ladies’ Swimming Club who swam in the sluggish tidal waters of the River Thames from Hampton Court Bridge to Teddington Weir, a distance of four and three-quarter miles, in four hours. While applauding Miss Harker’s stamina, “one of the many characteristics of the sportswoman,” the magazine noted that such severe testing of woman’s athletic ability was “hardly advisable.” In cycling, too, perhaps the most liberating of all the sports which emerged in this period, women tested their physical limits and the limits which conventional wisdom placed upon their behaviour. Tours

16. Hargreaves, ““Playing,”” p. 46; Ada S. Ballin, “Sea-Bathing,” *Womanhood* 2 (July 1899): 120-23; Austin Ferrand, “Water Polo for Ladies,” *ibid.*, 2 (September 1899): 307-9; *ibid.*, 7 (February 1902): 202; 5 (March 1901): 282; 5 (April 1901): 362; 2 (September 1899): 304; 5 (March 1901): 285.

17. By 1906, affiliates of the Amateur Swimming Association sponsored five regional championships for women. *The Englishwoman’s Year Book and Directory*, 1906, p. 173; *Womanhood* 3 (April 1900): 360; 5 (February 1901): 202; 6 (November 1901): 444.

throughout the United Kingdom and even to the Continent were acceptable, but "scorching," racing, and hill-climbing contests were frowned upon. Some sportswomen, nonetheless, stepped outside the limits of conventionality and, challenging the image of passive, fragile womanhood, they inevitably forced the redefinition of what it meant to be female. On the simply experiential and personal level, they explored their own physicality and sensuality, as one young woman's account of swimming reveals. She writes of "the delightful sensation, once realised, of being thoroughly at home in the water . . . while disporting oneself at ease in the deep, one is apt to cast back a look of regret at the spectacle of the bathers in shore bobbing up and down in the belief that they are enjoying themselves and to wish that everyone of them would but teach herself to swim, and thus enjoy the real pleasure of bathing."¹⁸ Swimming, like other sports, could be and was justified on the grounds of health and utility, but it was also a means of extending the female sphere of action and of acknowledging woman's corporal side.

If any game could be said to typify the accepted view of female sport in this period, that game would probably be croquet. Together with archery it was very popular with upper and middle class Victorians of both sexes, but despite this, historians have tended to marginalise and trivialise both sports. Certain contemporary accounts also suggest that there was some masculine ambivalence about these pastimes because they were considered to be rather "effeminate." The regular sportswriter of *Womanhood*, for one, felt that many men spurned the games because they were so popular with women, a sentiment which was certainly expressed by a contributor to a well-known sporting magazine of the day: "nobody could have called it [croquet] a good game played, as it was, with only one hand in order that the womenfolk might be able to guard their complexions from the sun . . . a game of frills and fancies, of petticoats, giggles and maidenly blushes." Certainly croquet and archery were particularly suitable for women, given that they required no gross physical action and that most women's clothing was highly restrictive at this time. However, both activities demanded a high degree of fine motor skill and hand-eye co-ordination, and on these terms men held no advantage over women. It is tempting to suggest that this may have contributed to any male antipathy that may have existed for contemporary accounts of competitive croquet illustrate that, at least in this sport, women made no concessions to male supremacy.¹⁹

Croquet was introduced into Ireland from France in 1852, and, thanks to its appropriateness as a garden party amusement, became something of a craze

18. Dr. Martyn Westcott expressed similarly complex attitudes in an account of an Austrian woman's attempt to swim the English Channel. After recounting the considerable courage and physical prowess of Madame Walburga van Icaescu, he concluded: "There are better uses in life, however, for the endurance of a woman than attempting to break the record of swimming across the English Channel." Martyn Westcott, "A Woman's Swimming Feat," *Womanhood* 4 (October 1900): 338; Helen C. Black, "On Learning to Swim," *ibid.*, 2 (August 1899): 214-16; *ibid.*, 6 (November 1901): 444; 2 (June 1899): 215.

19. *Ibid.*, 2 (July 1899): 128; N. Wymer, *Sport in England* (London: George B. Hanup, 1949), iv, quoted in Hargreaves, "Playing," p. 43.

with the upper and middle classes in the 1860s and 1870s. After a decade or so, the game's popularity waned but there was a revival of interest during the 1890s and membership in the All England Croquet Association increased fifteen-fold between 1896 and 1906. Along with this expansion came a refinement of technique and codification of the rules. By 1904, the Association's code of play was generally accepted and success in the game became dependent upon scientific precision and skill. These developments took croquet a long way from its origins as a diverting pastime for private garden parties and into the realm of organised sport. The competitive season began in May with the London Championships and closed in September with a tournament in Eastbourne. Something of the growth and extent of competitive play can be gauged from the fact that the number of Open Meetings held per season rose from four to fifty in the decade spanning the turn of the century, while in the first two months of the 1905 season, eighty tournaments were scheduled.²⁰

Since the game lent itself to singles, mixed, and doubles play, men and women were often enjoined in competition. The Single Handicap event of the 1902 Irish Championship was won by a woman who defeated three other women and two men on her way to victory, and an interesting account of another competition in the same year shows that the best female players in no way deferred to their male counterparts. The writer delights here in the discomfiture which may have been occasioned by these encounters: "Miss Gower repeated her triumph over the men of a year ago, and in doing so not only displayed much of the skill that has made her name famous wherever the pastime is played, but positively appeared to upset the form of her opponents, notably Mr. H. Black, whose tenacity . . . seemed to desert him, and Mr. Woolston, who, despite his high abilities . . . is apparently quite incapable of playing his best against the championess." In 1905, Miss Gower became the first female winner of the All England Open Championship. Clearly, players such as this, and there are references to several others, were far more than refining influences and decorative additions to the croquet lawns.²¹ A serious analysis of this largely overlooked pastime is surely due for there were very few other sports in which women competed seriously against men and croquet may offer an important avenue for exploring exactly how ideas about masculinity and femininity were being created and how gender relations were being shaped in sport at this time.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the legitimisation of women's participation in a considerable number of individual sports was largely achieved, and even the most traditionally minded headmistress would have concurred with Sara Burstall when she asserted that "we want a sound healthy animal, trained in good bodily habits, if we are successfully to achieve intellectual and moral

20. Hargreaves, "Playing," p. 43; *Womanhood* 8 (July 1902): 127; 2 (July 1899): 128; 5 (March 1901): 284; 6 (November 1901): 443; 11 (April 1904): 293; 14 (June 1905): 48; L. Dod, "Ladies' Lawn Tennis," in J. M. Heathcote et al., *Tennis* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., Badminton Library, 1890), p. 307; "Garden Games in General, and Lawn Tennis in Particular," *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* 5 (August 1879): 343.

21. *Womanhood* 8 (August 1902): 204; 2 (September 1899): 307; 8 (June 1902): 53; 14 (August 1905): 241; 14 (June 1905): 48; 14 (July 1905): 114; *The Englishwoman's Year Book and Directory*. 1906, p. 192.

education." Any private school with pretensions to quality included some form of gymnastics and games in its curriculum, but the latter, and especially team sports, were a far more controversial proposition than therapeutic physical exercise had ever been. Even those who pioneered games and physical education had considerable reservations about the appropriateness of females playing field hockey and cricket and it took rather longer for these sports to become acceptable. One of the most cautious was Dorothea Beale, headmistress at the prestigious Cheltenham Ladies' College who believed that competitive sports were a threat to female dignity, gentleness, and courtesy. As Burstall noted, they represented too great a break with customary practice to be easily integrated, and she and several others inclined to the view that the wisest rule for girls and women in this regard was "Not too Much." Indeed, well into the twentieth century, parents, teachers, and medical practitioners invoked some form of the Clarke-Maudsley thesis of the 1870s to warn against vigorous athletics: "Do we not all know of brilliant players for college or school ruined in health, at least for long years, by playing some violent game when physically unfit? No one can regret such cases more than those who most approve of athletics for girls."²²

But by the 1890s, thanks to the propagandising of advocates such as Penelope Lawrence of Roedean, and to the zeal of hockey-playing, college educated schoolmistresses, the games cult began to flourish in certain girls' schools. Competitive games were by no means universally accepted by this time, but institutions such as Roedean typically embraced hockey, cricket and lacrosse, and by 1897, the school's population of about one hundred pupils supported eight cricket and ten hockey teams. Dire warnings issued by members of the scientific and medical professions did little to deter the players: "No mere physical enjoyment can explain the intensity of excitement in matches . . . Not only quickness and skill but staying power, combination, resource, the courage to play a losing game and the generosity to be a good winner, all those qualities once supposed to be untypical of girls, are there . . ."²³

The progress of sports such as field hockey and cricket was undoubtedly hesitant and this was reflected in their coverage in *Womanhood*. Significantly, given that it was not until the 1890s that such activities were fully integrated into schools, the first reference to hockey appeared in 1899, when it was noted

22. McCrone, "'Play Up!'" pp. 118-20; Atkinson, "Fitness, Feminism and Schooling," pp. 101-7; Edward H. Clarke, *Sex in Education, Or, A Fair Chance for the Girls* (Boston: Osgood, 1873); Julia Ward Howe, ed., *Sex and Education: A Reply to Dr. E. H. Clarke's "Sex in Education"* (Boston: Stoddart, 1874); Henry Maudsley, "Sex in Mind and Education," *Fortnightly Review* 15 (1874): 466-83; Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, "Sex in Mind and Education: A Reply," *ibid.*, 582-94; Elaine and English Showalter, "Victorian Women and Menstruation," in *Vicinus, Suffer and Be Still*, pp. 41-43; C. S. Bremner, *Education of Girls and Women in Great Britain* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1897), pp. 192-95; Patricia Vertinsky, "Exercise, Physical Capability, and the Eternally Wounded Woman in Late Nineteenth Century America," *Journal of Sport History* 14 (1987): 7-27. The Quotation is from an address given by Mrs. Corbett who represented the "mother's point of view" at the 1906 National Union of Women Worker's Conference. See Burstall, *English High Schools*. pp. 101-2; Alicia C. Percival, *The English Miss Today and Yesterday: Ideals, Methods and Personalities in the Education and Upbringing of Girls During the Last Hundred Years* (London: George G. Harmp & Co., 1939), p. 218.

23. McCrone, "'Play Up!'" pp. 121, 125, 129; Julia M. Grant, Katherine McKutcheon, and Ethel F. Sanders, eds., *St. Leonard's School, 1877-1927* (Oxford, 1927), p. 60, quoted in McCrone, "'Play Up!'" p. 123.

that it was becoming popular, and that club membership was opening up to more women. In the following year, a writer commented negatively upon the tendency towards competitive play rather than general participation: "Were there no such degeneracy of striving to cram the greatest amount of exertion into the specified time of a game, then there could be competitions of both sexes taking part," he judged. As the first generation of hockey-playing schoolgirls moved out into the adult world and formed their own clubs, accounts of women's matches appeared more often, reflecting the rapid development of the game. From eight founding clubs in 1895, the national governing association of women's hockey expanded to twenty-eight in 1897, and to around 300 in 1904. By 1906, the level of competition extended from school and club through to county, regional, national, and international. *Womanhood* captured the state of the sport in that year. 'Vigorous, vivacious young womanhood is certainly seen at her athletic best when taking part in some keen struggle with the sticks between the goals,' it noted. "That ladies should take part in inter-county contests . . . would have been even only a few years ago considered a forward movement, but we have got happily into more advantageously advanced times."²⁴

But the tremendous popularity of this and other games, lacrosse, cricket, and netball, produced the almost inevitable reaction. Even those who advocated competitive games for girls and women expressed concern that there was "a danger of making a fetish of exercise, and this is becoming increasingly marked amongst women." At the 1907 conference of The Headmistresses' Association, Dr. Jane Walker cautioned that the case for the contribution of physical health and strength to the national well-being was overstated: "Far more important is our intellectual supremacy, and immeasurably more important is our moral and spiritual prowess."²⁵ Furthermore, it was in this post-Freudian period that psychologists for the first time identified, categorised, and defined lesbianism as a form of sexual deviance. Any suggestion of gender crossing or aspiring to such male privileges as sport could be taken as a symptom of what was believed to be a congenital condition. Supposedly typical characteristics of the sporting New Woman, a lean, muscular frame, athletic ability, a dislike of "feminine" pursuits, were now inextricably linked with "mannish lesbianism." Boarding schools which nurtured a girl's passion for athletic games were also believed to foster what had come to be defined as "unnatural" friendships between females. Little wonder that, as McCrone concludes, the general attitude towards vigorous sports for women in the first few decades of the twentieth century was equivocal. She argues that, despite the changes, there was a great deal of unease that games such as hockey and cricket would "unsex" women and that sport continued to be seen

24. *Womanhood* 3 (January 1900): 117; 5 (February 1901): 204; 6 (November 1901): 444; 7 (March 1902): 305-6; 11 (March 1904): 221; 11 (April 1904): 293; 13 (February 1905): 248; 11 (February 1904): 163; 15 (January 1906): 176. Cricket did not become popularised beyond girls' schools in this period. Upper class women did play occasional games on private country estates, sometimes for charitable purposes, but "very rarely as a game for public approbation." *The English woman's Year Book and Directory, 1906*, p. 193.

25. Burstall, *English High Schools*. p. 99; idem, *Public Schools*. pp. 211-14.

as a male preserve in which their involvement, except as spectators, was anomalous.²⁶

Understandably, some also associated sporting activity quite explicitly with feminism. Nineteenth century sport was a quintessentially masculine domain and its value system interlocked very neatly with that of the patriarchal social system. Through competing, exerting, and excelling in sport, women inevitably challenged an ideology which served to cast them in a subordinate, essentially passive role. The Womanhood Field Club, born out of this same feminist consciousness, was one means of asserting female autonomy and self-determination. The matter was first raised in December, 1900 by a correspondent who suggested that Womanhood's readers should form an association to enable them to "visit pretty and interesting spots." Ada Ballin took up the cause with zeal. Pointing to what she considered to be a pressing need, she asserted that anyone taking the initiative in forming a society for the promotion of female sport was "to a great extent breaking new ground, though why there should be such a remarkable lack of organisation in respect of women's recreations is, to my mind, hardly clear." Since there were several women's sporting bodies in existence at this time, her assessment of the situation was not entirely accurate. An umbrella association with the specific aim of promoting women's recreations, and the more general objective of advancing the "welfare of womankind" through sport was a novel enterprise, nonetheless. As the project developed, there emerged a clear consciousness of inequity in the male dominated sport system and a determination on the part of the readership of *Womanhood* to institute collective action in order that women's needs might be better served.²⁷

The Womanhood Field Club never became the national movement of Ada Ballin's dreams, but it elicited support from a variety of sporting groups. The most concrete success was the founding of a lawn bowling club, the creation of which highlights some of the problems which women had in attempting to participate in a male dominated sport system. A group of male and female lawn bowlers had, for some time, played on the greens of the Crystal Palace until the

26. Esther Newton suggests that writers such as Radclyffe Hall used masculinised, athletic characters to represent the assertiveness and modernity of a "second generation" New Woman. Martha Vicinus notes that the earliest definitions of lesbianism usually included some reference to women engaging in what were considered to be masculine endeavours. See Esther Newton, "The Mythic, Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the Lesbian Image," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 9 (Summer 1984): 566; Martha Vicinus, "Distance and Desire: English Boarding-School Friendships," *ibid.*, p. 619. Lillian Faderman argues that by the 1920s, the definition and labelling of lesbianism made close female relationships much less acceptable than they had been in earlier eras. See Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Morrow, 1981), p. 311. Sexologist Havelock Ellis stated that "sexual inversion" in women was often characterised by "some capacity for athletics." He also argued that both girls and boys usually had their first homosexual experiences at boarding school. See Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, vol. 1 (1897; rep., New York: Random House, 1936), pp. 216-19, 250, 368-84. Headmistresses of girls' schools were concerned about the intense friendships or "raves" which were commonplace in these single-sex institutions and some argued that athletic games were one means of controlling such "silly sentimentality." See Burstall, *English High Schools*, pp. 99-100, 160-61; Percival, *The English Miss*, pp. 220-25.

27. The term feminism is being used here in a broad sense to denote the recognition of women's oppression in a patriarchal system, a determination to oppose that oppression, and a desire to construct a world more in tune with women's expectations and needs. This is taken from Susan Birrell, "Separatism as an Issue in Women's Sport," *Arena Review* 8 (1978): 22; *Womanhood* 5 (December 1900): 118; Ada S. Ballin, "Womanhood Field Club," *ibid.*, 5 (February 1901): 204; *ibid.*, 5 (March 1901): 286; 5 (April 1901): 368; Fletcher, *Women First*, p. 32.

men took it upon themselves to exclude the women from their games. The reason for this is not clear, but one objection which men frequently voiced against female players was that the long trains of their dresses spoiled the playing surface of the lawn. Whatever the cause, they set up an exclusively male club elsewhere, an organisation which apparently flourished without the support of female members. It was thus with some relish that Ballin established the lawn bowling section of the W. F. C. on the very site of this inter-sex skirmish, the grounds of the Crystal Palace.²⁸

On May 25, 1901, the Womanhood Bowling Club hosted its first event, a club competition for a pair of silver mounted bowls. The contest attracted an excellent list of entries and the sponsoring magazine lauded itself: "Bowling for ladies is undoubtedly fast coming to the front, and all that was lacking was some definite lead to be taken in establishing a thoroughly organised club. The want has been supplied in the Womanhood Bowling Club." Ballin's claim that the club's influence extended to and beyond national boundaries cannot be substantiated, nor was this the only front on which the sport was developing for women. However, the project was significant inasmuch as it showed how women dealt with a patriarchal system which either excluded them or included them only on male terms. Women took the initiative and formed an association which would satisfy their needs but in doing so they still had to operate within certain male-defined parameters: the use of a club pavilion, for example, was acquired through the goodwill of the renowned cricketer Dr. W. G. Grace.²⁹

III

Women's involvement in sport in this period was not inevitably restricted by ideological constraints, though notions such as the "angel in the house" certainly influenced the nature and extent of that involvement, even in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Concerned parties, Ada Ballin included, worried about extremes of exertion, neglect of duty, and outrageous behaviour, but these were criticisms which they also levelled at men, as Bruce Haley's admirable account of the intellectual opposition to the cult of athleticism shows. Furthermore, although the -ideological strictures of Victorian patriarchy seem so have held powerful sway, it is highly unlikely that they ever extended completely into the lives of all women. There were other, perhaps equally powerful and potentially liberating, ideas emanating from educational institutions in the latter part of the nineteenth century and these eventually had some influence upon developments within female sport.³⁰

The model of competitive sport and games which emerged in the boy's public schools after about 1860 was consciously emulated in the 1890s in girls' schools. There, the new breed of collegiate sportswomen introduced and

28. *Womanhood* 7 (March 1902): 305; 5 (March 1901): 368; 5 (April 1901): 358.

29. *Ibid.* 6 (July 1901): 118; 6 (August 1901): 212; 6 (September 1901): 284-85; 7 (March 1902): 304.

30. Bruce Haley, *The Healthy Body and the Victorian Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978); Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). p. 125.

enthusiastically endorsed the games system and its attendant ideological package. Notwithstanding the warnings of conservative medical experts, female educational reformers insisted that there were invaluable lessons to be learned on the playing field, as much for women as for men. The acceptance of these activities in the school system helped to create a climate of opinion that was more favourably disposed to sport for women generally and thus contributed to the piecemeal redefinition of traditional notions of womanhood. The complex nature of the ideas which were held about women's involvement in sport during this period is reflected in a review of the situation in 1901:

The majority of people are convinced that the time and energy expended by the modern maid and matron in pursuit of health and recreation produce results of a most satisfactory nature. There are still, however, a great number of well-meaning folk who regard active participation of women in sport as degrading and an abomination, while a still greater number are inclined to severely limit the amount and nature of the exercise in which the female sex shall indulge.³¹

It is clear that there was some ambivalence regarding the sporting woman but it is also clear that as an active and enthusiastic participant, she was reshaping the female image-and *Womanhood* was one means by which that new image was transmitted beyond the fields of play.

In the broader scheme of things why should it matter that women involved themselves in competitive sport? At the simplest level, it is important because it represented another sphere of action opened up for the potential involvement of all women. In a period in which the overtly political campaign to advance women's cause was in a phase of retrenchment, when the envisioned physical freedom of expression of the New Woman was foundering on the shoals of conservatism, sporting women were, less obviously, advancing the feminist cause.³² No claim is being made here for overtly, or even consciously political action, but the fact remains that by their very behaviour, athletic women were forcing ideological and actual change; what was happening in women's sport at this time did not simply reflect social and cultural change, it was a constitutive element of such change.

When Tony Mason notes that one of the problems facing historians of sport in this period is "the nature and bulk of the material," he is, of course, referring to the embarrassment of rich sources with which scholars of male sport have been endowed. By 1914, there were some eighty-seven sporting periodicals, plus a considerable amount of sports' coverage in the newspaper press.³³ Those interested in women's sport are presented with a rather different problem, one which stems from the nature and paucity of source material. In this paper I have suggested that historians need to look beyond prescriptive literature and, on the basis of evidence from a small sample of what one magazine reported, I have

31. W. G. George, *Womanhood* 5 (May 1901): 439.

32. Fernando, "New Women," p. 5-6.

33. Tony Mason, "Sporting News, 1860-1914," in *The Press in English Society from the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Michael Harris and Alan Lee (London: Associated University Presses, 1986). p. 169.

argued that the contemporary female periodical press may prove to be an important source. Between 1876 and 1919, about one hundred female magazines were published. If only a fraction of these devoted only a fraction of their pages to women's sport, then they at least offer the possibility of getting through the barriers of prescriptions on women's sport and of getting to actual practices. They should not, therefore, be overlooked.