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“Bicycle-face” and “Lawn Tennis” Girls: Debating Girls’ Health in Late
Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century British Periodicals’

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Abstract

In the final quarter of the nineteenth century, as periodical literature itself diversified and increased in volume, a growing amount of copy was devoted to the medical issues of the day, including debates about the limits of young women’s energy and the impact of the extension of their activities in education, public life and sport on their health and vitality, and their future role as mothers. The article explores the ways in which doctors in particular utilized these outlets to convey their opinions and concerns, revealing a great diversity of viewpoints as well as the flexible editorial policies of many of these journals. Both male and a growing cohort of female doctors employed the platform of the periodical to popularize and make relevant medical ideas, whilst also building on, highlighting and creating broader cultural and gendered perspectives and emblems of girlhood.

Keywords

Periodicals, girls, health, doctors, education, sport

Research into representations of girls’ health and health advice for young women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has highlighted the extent to which medical, popular health, and general interest periodicals and

magazines debated girls' capacity for improving their wellbeing and vitality, particularly in relation to their ambitions to engage in new public, educational and sporting activities.¹ A vast diversity of print media – health advice manuals, pamphlets and tracts, newspapers, magazines as well as journals – discussed girls' potential to enhance their health, and the ways they might achieve this, or, conversely, by pitting their slender physical and mental resources against overlarge challenges, their potential for ruin: 'Troubles ahead for Women'.² Editorials, leading articles, health columns and letters pages examined and re-examined the issue of girls' ability to develop their ambitions in secondary and higher education and the benefits of sports and exercise. They also debated the impact that mental and physical exertion might have on young women's developing bodies, minds and capacity for future motherhood, the limits of girls' energy, and the relationship between bodily and mental strain and gain. Such pieces featured, amongst many other outlets, in major literary and general interest journals, such as *The Nineteenth Century*, *The Fortnightly Review* and *The Saturday Review*, the evangelical family magazine, *The Leisure Hour*, the reform orientated digest *Review of Reviews* and *The Woman's Signal*, with its focus on temperance reform, feminist issues and women's employment, lay health periodicals, such as *Health* and *Good Health*, and a growing number of magazines devoted to women and girl readers. The potential and dangers of new educational, vocational and physical challenges were criticized and contested or advocated and welcomed by an equally broad range of authorities on this topic: medical practitioners, including a growing cohort of women doctors, headmistress and teachers, gymnastics instructors, journalists, social commentators and feminists.

Notably, as Kate Flint has remarked, doctors engaged more extensively with wider publics through their published work from the 1870s onwards, not least on the subject of the relationship between health and female education, as debate on this topic 'spread from specialist texts to a range of publications with the potential to reach a wider readership'.³ Increasingly too, journalists and other contributors to periodicals cited the published work or opinions of medical men and women, drawing on their sometimes provocative viewpoints to produce topical opinion pieces. These trends were boosted in 1874 following an influential exchange between eminent psychiatrist, Dr Henry Maudsley, best known for his views on social and mental degeneration, and Dr Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, the first Englishwoman to qualify as a physician and surgeon, suffragette and active supporter of higher education for girls, on the relationship between study and the health and reproductive capacity of young women.⁴ The debate took place not in a medical journal as we might expect, but in two issues of *The Fortnightly Review*, a wide-circulation periodical renown for its engagement with the topics of the day, and for publishing articles that dealt with female emancipation and reform in academia and the workplace.

Maudsley warned in his lengthy article, 'Sex in Mind and in Education', that appeared in the April edition of the *The Fortnightly Review*, that overspending vital energy would produce menstrual disorders and mental collapse, and potentially destroy young women's future capacity to bear healthy children.⁵ His piece gave credence to a theory that was to dominate the late Victorian era and persist well beyond it, that the body – particularly the female

body – contained a limited supply of vital energy to fuel its physical and mental activities, and ‘what was spent in one period was bound to be missed in another’.⁶ Garrett Anderson’s robust rejoinder was published in the following issue of the periodical, and argued that, provided teachers took care to monitor girls’ health and protect them from mental fatigue and excessive physical activity, study was unlikely to be a threat to their wellbeing. Indeed, it was likely to enhance health; headmistresses and other reformers had sought, she avowed, with marked success to improve, through exercise and hygienic practices, the physical development of girls alongside their mental training.⁷ This controversy and its repercussions, have been covered in detail elsewhere, but its significance lay not just in its impact on deliberations about young women’s health in the scientific press, but also for the way it was taken up in articles and discussion pieces in a huge number of outlets, some liberal and reformist, and many not, that continued to appear on this topic in the decades to follow, exemplifying the potential of the periodical as a means of communicating important medical topics and viewpoints.⁸

The Victorian period saw a rapid expansion in the number and range of periodicals, ‘a pervasiveness of periodical literature’, a process that Vann and VanArsdel have attributed to advances in printing techniques, lower printing costs (and thus lower purchasing prices), and new channels of distribution, but most significantly to the potential for this widely circulated print media to document and contribute to the cultural shift from less sophisticated and less urbanized times to the modern era.⁹ Significantly, when girls’ health was discussed, it was often set in the context of urban growth and a rapidly changing

environment, which offered a particular set of opportunities but also challenges to physical and mental health. Improved literacy also contributed to the proliferation of periodicals and magazines, aimed at a widening range of social classes, notably the Elementary Education Act of 1870, which standardized and enhanced educational practices for members of the working class, and improved literacy to such an extent that periodicals saw marked increases in their readerships.¹⁰

The periodical press also tracked and stimulated debates on questions of gender identity, ideology and practice, providing a numerous outlets for feminists and social commentators as well as doctors, male and female, to express their views.¹¹ As early as 1850, writer, theorist and advocate of women's rights, Harriet Martineau engaged with the question of healthful activities for young women, encouraging swimming and rowing, while in 1887 Dr Frances Hoggan, Medical Inspector to the North London Collegiate School for Girls, contributed to the increasingly energized debate on cycling for women, suggesting that girls could derive great benefits from cycling while also stressing that racing, competitive cycling and strenuous training was bad for women and girls.¹² Hoggan was to exemplify the cautious approach taken by a number of women doctors in advocating girls' participation in education and sport, as, in her role as Medical Inspector to a leading girls' school, the North London Collegiate School for Girls, she traversed the complex relationships between school and home, teachers and parents, learning and exercise, and met the challenges of maintaining the wellbeing of pupils, many of whom – despite their relative affluence – were in a state of poor health and physique.¹³

Women formed a significant contingent of the growth in periodical readership, and many publishers introduced journals geared towards women's interests in the second half of the nineteenth century, a process coinciding with a more general feminization of the press, and the appearance of visually more enticing magazines and journals.¹⁴ Margaret Beetham has illuminated the range and coverage of this new periodical literature for women between 1800 and 1914, demonstrating the complex and evolving engagement with their readership, and the ways that they sought to 'bring into being the women they addressed'.¹⁵ The high end and lavishly illustrated society journal, the *Queen*, for example, kept ladies informed on fashion and fashionable society, and also dealt with topics such as higher education for women and female employment, and advocated cycling for ladies, as well as girls clubs and gymnastics. It brought 'the concept of the lady, the techniques of illustration and the category of news into dynamic relationships with each other' and was also marked by 'an energetic, even frenetic, eclecticism'.¹⁶ Hand in hand with the growth of periodical literature for women, the late nineteenth century was also notable for a further separation, of girls as a discrete readership with particular needs and interests, an aspect of the New Journalism of the 1880s and 1890s 'with its ever more diversified target groups'.¹⁷ And though the precise ages (and social classes) addressed by these new magazines remained elusive, as many attracted a younger and more mature readership as well as their core audience of adolescent girls, young women readers were increasingly catered for by such magazines as the *Girl's Own Paper (GOP)* (1880), *Young Gentlewoman* (1892), *The Girl's Realm* (1898), and *The Girl's Friend* (1899), which included material on

careers and lifestyle, health and exercise, with much of their content urging readers to engage with new ideas and activities, and instructing them on how to do so.¹⁸

This expanding number of periodicals, including specialist (though often short-lived) lay health journals, provided doctors who might not have had been motivated to publish full-length health guides and instructional manuals (though many did), with the opportunity to write articles and short position pieces, to contribute to advice columns, and to translate their medical interests and concerns into general interest pieces, on topics such as reform clothing, hygiene and beauty, diet and abstinence, exercise and cycling, public health and the physiology of work.¹⁹ For many, this would be a natural extension of the process of publishing in medical periodicals, as these became ‘the preferred form of communication among professional men and women’.²⁰ A diversity of medical authors set about building a publication profile in lay periodicals – including established specialists and acknowledged leaders in their field, such as Maudsley, generalists interested in these subjects, school medical officers and women practitioners, who, like Garrett Anderson, claimed special insight into women’s struggles to overcome resistance to their take up of new and challenging roles, or, like Hoggan, exercised caution in their recommendations. Doctors were led into debates with other, often self-styled, experts on the topic of girls’ health and exercise – headmistresses and teachers, gymnastics instructors, journalists and campaigners for women’s rights. To a certain extent, writers on girls’ health, as they debated what it consisted of and who had the

right to decide this, as well as competing for copy space, vied to establish authority to instruct on and manage the process of healthful adolescence.

For many medical authors, their interest in publishing in lay outlets was inspired by a desire to raise their profile and establish their expertise in particular fields, though few were explicit in stating this objective. Many, however, declared their intentions of making an impact in the quest to improve girls' health, however they interpreted it. Physician, spiritualist and food reformer, Dr Anna Bonus Kingsford, published a series of 'Letters to Ladies' in *The Lady's Pictorial* between 1884 and 1886, which were later collected together in a volume on health and beauty for women and girls, a result, she asserted of a stream of correspondence requesting that she write such a manual. She claimed this as the first guide 'to instruct her sex on matters connected with the improvement and preservation of physical grace and good looks', taking the opportunity in addition to market a range of preparations to improve complexion and enhance the bathing experience.²¹ The American physician I. P. Davis wrote a series of pieces on hygiene for girls in *Golden Hours*, a magazine for family and general consumption, in 1883, advising on amusements and exercise, nerves and the role of imagination, illuminating the growing trend for medical writers to traverse the Atlantic in their publications. While recommending a wide range of sports and healthful activities for young women, most were accompanied with warnings concerning over-exertion and access, Davis arguing that such activities should be adapted to their nature and condition.²² Writing and publishing provided an important income stream for the redoubtable Dr Gordon Stables, prolific author of adventure stories, producer of an extensive

range of health guides, and health columnist for both the *GOP* and the *Boy's Own Paper*.²³ Dr Elizabeth Sloan Chesser, who, even as a medical student had earned money selling articles to local newspapers, published extensively on girls' adolescence, sexual hygiene, mothercraft and childrearing from the 1910s onwards, much of her work being aimed at a wide readership. As she became an established medical journalist, Chesser committed herself to promoting widening access of women to professional work, careers outside the home and public life, while also urging individual responsibility for health and fitness and the importance of motherhood. For Dr Mary Scharlieb, who produced numerous books and articles intended for both specialist and general readerships, women could have it all, including a professional career, but first and foremost she promoted the importance of motherhood for the national good. Youth, in her view, was a time of great instability, particularly for girls, 'whose mental powers were over-taxed' and who risked losing 'vigour and health of body'. Yet managed carefully by doctors, parents and teachers, 'the reward is great and the possibilities are great'.²⁴

Increasingly periodical publications targeted particular readerships, including young women themselves. Their features also spoke directly to their readership, creating an intimacy between author and reader though the terms 'we' or 'you' and establishing the creation of good health practices as a joint concern. Dr Gordon Stables, who edited the *GOP's* health column for over thirty years, an ex-naval surgeon with a jaunty, straightforward, bracing, no-nonsense approach, described how 'I desire to teach my girl readers how to be healthy', as he developed a chatty (though to our eyes cloying) intimacy with his readers,

including in his columns and advice books vignettes about girls who did well and those who went astray, such as Fanny Ffisher who lost her figure and found it again.²⁵ He concluded that the majority of the *GOP*'s readers were 'healthy in lungs and nerves... stout-hearted and strong-limbed'.²⁶ Describing how girls could further improve their strength, he provided an A to Z of dietary hints, advising morning baths and walking. 'Do not stop to stare in shop windows, but walk as if you were meant doing something [*sic*].'²⁷ 'Keep a smiling face... fretting weakens the body'. 'The mind has much to do with the health of the body. Try to control your temper, never get angry.'²⁸ Stables went a long way towards defining his own girl type, his '*GOP* girls', robust all-rounders, of good character but perhaps lacking somewhat in ambition: it was never quite clear what Stables actually intended his girl readers to do with their hard won health and vitality.

Healthy girlhood was also attached to particular girl 'types' as periodical authors both created and engaged with wider trends and labels, such as the 'Girton Girl', 'a healthy young girl... she rode, she sang, she danced, she played tennis... she could construe one of the hardest bits of Aeschylus'.²⁹ The wondrous Girton Girl was, however, accompanied by other emblems of girlhood, several of whom were far from positive, bachelor girls, who sacrificed femininity to ambition and modernity, sporting types, factory girls, florid, silly and slapdash, 'The Revolting Daughter' and journalist Lynn Linton's 'Girl of the Period', who first made her appearance in the *Saturday Review* in 1868, and who flouted the conventions of traditional femininity, 'a creature whose sole idea of life is fun'.³⁰ Amongst these girl types, the 'sporting girl' was framed increasingly as modern and aspirational, particularly by those with a vested interest in promoting sport

for girls, adapting to new urban lifestyles (for example, regularly attending a gymnasium as these sprang up in many major towns or cycling in public parks), energetic, and working hard to improve her health. Catherine Horwood has noted that studying women's leisure patterns 'is a vital barometer of their ability to achieve equality', while Kathleen McCrone and Jennifer Hargreaves have described the take up by women and girls of physical activities and then competitive sport as challenging male exclusivity and representing feminist hopes and ambitions, as 'a new and important form of freedom', albeit one that initially was largely enjoyed by well-to-do women who could afford the associated costs and leisure time.³¹

Many doctors were eager to promote the health benefits of a well-conceived exercise culture. In 1891 Dr Alfred Schofield, Harley Street physician and prolific author on doctor-patient relationships, health practices and nervous disorders, concluded that too few girls took sufficient exercise or played enough games, which undermined their wellbeing, particularly against the backdrop an increasingly urbanized lifestyle: 'we confess that we consider these outdoor games and exercises necessities of almost priceless value to the population'.³² Schofield was an intriguing figure, an active Christian, who saw the Church as having an important role in setting down the rules of life in terms of abstinence, food regimen and other health laws. He argued for the use of 'unconscious therapeutics' in his patients and the need for effective and considerate communication between doctor and patient, particularly women patients, the importance of sensitivity and listening.³³ His advice in periodicals such as *The Leisure Hour*, a journal that by virtue of its evangelical stance was a suitable

outlet for Schofield, was pragmatic and generally supportive of strategies to improve girl's health and vigour, promoting a robust mental as well as physical approach (like the *GOP*, which Schofield also contributed to, *The Leisure Hour* was published by the Religious Tract Society). Hysteria's victims, he argued were typically underworked, unhappy, suffering mental strain, or exposed to an ill-balanced education; the secret of cure was 'feeling true sympathy from the conviction of the reality of the disease, but showing none'.³⁴ He tied the laws of health for girls not just to their general wellbeing but also to medical benefits and gains. He recommended exercise for health and 'firmness of limb, shapely, with well-developed muscle'. This was good for the heart, improved digestion and got rid of rheumatic and neuralgic pains. Exercise offered relief for a tired brain, and given the 'sudden increase in mental strain in the higher education of women... a safety-valve must be found in the increase in all sorts of physical pursuits'.³⁵

Support for girls training and praise for sporty types would not go uncontested, far from it. In 1899, writer, physician and 'eugenic feminist', Arabella Kenealy related the story of Clara to the readers of the literary magazine *The Nineteenth Century*, which contained regular features on women's health and exercise, including the cycle craze.³⁶ 'A year ago Clara could not walk more than two miles without tiring; now she can play tennis or hockey, or can bicycle all day without feeling it.' Through exercise and a vigorous lifestyle, Clara had toned and honed muscles, was slimmer, stronger and more agile. However, she had also lost many of her subtle charms and qualities in the process, according to Kenealy, including sympathy and patience, and her elusive beauty.

In its place a booming voice, highly toned body, a briskness, mere muscular achievement, and a 'bicycle face (the face of muscular tension)'. In Kenealy's view, Clara had traded her femininity for a strident muscularity as she achieved robust health.³⁷ She insisted that Clara and her sister athletes were squandering 'the birthright of the babies', 'debasement of her womanhood, in becoming a neuter', 'her children are nursed, fed, clothed, taught and trained by hirelings'.³⁸

The Nineteenth Century then opened up the debate. Echoing the earlier controversy between Henry Maudsley and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson a decade and half earlier, the response was quick and critical, and by this time, coloured by the fact that a great many girls by this time were taking up more exercise rather than seeking entry to higher education in relatively small numbers. It was also inflected by eugenicist views that were shaping debates on girl's health and the proper use of their energy, and which led to broader concerns about the impact of exercise on race and nation rather than upon individual wellbeing. In this case, the opposition was taken up by writer and feminist, Laura Ormiston Chant, who responded in the following issue of the periodical that female athleticism would lead to the improvement and embellishment of the race rather than its decline, and that muscular vigour and moral qualities would create a nobler and happier home life for athletic girls.³⁹ Kenealy came back with the final say in the following issue, claiming that the stress of 'over-athletics' would lead to 'masculine women and effeminate men – neuters – spoiled copies of the human edition'. Clara herself was 'converting womanhood into mannishness by the artificial stimulation of the masculine strain in her'. The bicycle 'by reason of the exhilaration and excitement attending its use – [was] most dangerously

prone to convert itself into a hobby-horse which rides its master (more still its mistress) to destruction'.⁴⁰ Physical exercise would produce, moreover, degeneration of the organs, cancer and gout; the counter to this was 'the conservation of the womanly forces. The woman whose physical completeness precludes her from spending all her energies in muscular or mental effort stores these for her children.'⁴¹

Kenealy's views can be contrasted with those of William Smout Playfair, Professor of Obstetric Medicine at King's College and obstetrician to King's College Hospital. Writing in a gynaecological textbook, Playfair adopted the emblem of 'Lawn Tennis Girl', lifted, as was his quotation on the benefits of tennis, from an 1895 issue of *The Speaker* magazine, to present his model of a modern, energetic girl. For Playfair, 'Lawn Tennis Girl', was

an excellent example of the healthy, well-developed, and unsentimental girl – the girl who does not think it necessary to devote herself to the study of her own emotions, and who finds in active physical exercise an antidote to the morbid fancies which are apt to creep into the mind of the idle and self-indulgent.⁴²

Clearly for some commentators it was the bicycle that was the problem rather than exercise more broadly, and Playfair's choice of 'Lawn Tennis Girl' to exemplify a sport that would bolster, rather than diminish, the health, wellbeing and femininity of girls was supported by other medical writers. One contributor to *The Practitioner* exclaimed in the same year 'it would be deplorable if girls

whom lawn-tennis has made, like daughters of the gods, divinely tall should be made humpbacked by the bicycle'.⁴³ Dr Alfred Schofield suggested 'There is no sight that speaks more for the future welfare of England than a group of well-made English girls returning from a tennis lawn; their every movement instinct with healthy life and vigour'.⁴⁴ Historians of sport have shown that while tennis started off as a decorous game for the affluent woman in the late nineteenth century, it gradually became a more active and energetic game, while mixed doubles, initially preserving conventional gender roles, by the interwar years incurred accusations of excessive participation and competitiveness for women players.⁴⁵

Alfred Schofield, however, alongside his support for tennis, expressed an enthusiasm for cycling, and in a piece published in the *GOP* in 1895 explained how he had been consulted by young ladies along with their mothers

to whom I felt this new exercise would prove a real boon, if used in moderation... it develops capacity and strengthens the brain without any risk of strain... it is no small recommendation of this new exercise that it is indubitably not only a healthy means of relieving the brain of over-pressure, but that it also exercises and strengthens this organ at the same time.⁴⁶

Concerned to urge moderation while also counteracting the strains of an increasingly urbanized lifestyle that robbed young women of outdoor exercise, physician and public health reformer, Sir Benjamin Ward Richardson advocated

cycling as a means of halting national degeneration. He reminded young women, however, that the dangers of passing 'in recreation beyond a certain bound of natural womanly duties, is to pass into a sphere with which such duties are utterly incompatible'.⁴⁷ That such views were widely held beyond the British Isles is demonstrated in Clare Simpson's article on women and cycling in late nineteenth-century New Zealand, who has illuminated the debates on respectability surrounding cycling, the importance of appropriate attire, posture and pace, and has also pointed out that issues of gender identity tended to be 'disproportionately satirized in magazines and newspapers' in relation to female cyclists.⁴⁸

The above examples complicate our expectations about who was likely to say what about the ways in which the health of young women and challenges to it were framed by medical men. While Kenealy was a professed feminist, she was also a eugenicist, her concerns about relations between the sexes prompted chiefly 'by anxiety about the future of the British race'.⁴⁹ In her preface to fellow eugenicist, Dr Emma Walker's advice manual *Beauty through Hygiene*, published in 1905, Kenealy warned against girls expending 'too large a share of our nervous force in athletic exercise', nerve force required for future investment in motherhood. She advised, once again, 'By habit and practice she may be able to convert herself into a mere muscular machine, but she can only do this at the expense of health and looks and qualities'.⁵⁰ Playfair, meanwhile, one of London's leading obstetric practitioners, with a lucrative private practice founded in part on the treatment of cases of neurasthenia, asserted that nerve exhaustion claimed as its victims many young women in transition from domestic to

professional roles, and elsewhere expressed concern about impact of study on young women's health. He thus put out mixed messages concerning women's ability to thrive, or, alternatively, to face physical or mental breakdown when confronted with new challenges in the schoolroom or sports field. Yet overall Playfair – as did many of his contemporaries – tended to steer a middle course, arguing for moderation, a tack taken by many medical commentators in debating the impact of education on young women. He encouraged headmistresses to pay attention to the establishment of girls' menstruation, to make proper provision for physical activity, and to check that girls were not given unreasonable amounts of work or worked excessive numbers of hours.⁵¹

Just as commentators on girls' health presented mixed messages, so too did the pages of host journals offer a variety of viewpoints. The *GOP* had a loose editorial regime, sometimes conservative in supporting traditional roles for women, at other times advocating new and exciting careers and sporting endeavours for its readership. In 1894 it praised modern girls for their 'strength and purpose'.⁵² A year later, however, another feature, authored by none other than Dr Alfred Schofield, suggested that while the 'modern girl' had become 'stronger and more active' she was in danger of becoming physically 'overpowering', 'losing her sweeter traits', 'hard and selfish'.⁵³ While *The Nineteenth Century* was willing to host Kenealy's article and the exchanges that followed, three years earlier, in 1896, it had published an influential piece by Dr William Hugh Fenton that strongly promoted cycling for women, at a point where the sport was still being vigorously contested. Fenton argued that cycling might level out the difference between the sexes, allowing women to throw off

some of their encumbrances, such as dress that hampered movement and to compensate for a lack of early training: 'Women are capable of great physical improvement where the opportunity exists'. A Harley Street physician and specialist on obstetrics and gynaecology, Fenton said little on this subject in his article, focusing rather on the ways in which cycling could achieve a revolution in women's muscular tone and power, if they adopted a careful approach to build condition and endurance.⁵⁴ While space prohibits analysis of debates and recommendations concerning appropriate sporting attire for women, doctors engaged actively in such discussions, notably with regard to cycling costumes, which went beyond considerations of respectability to consider comfort, movement and hygiene. While rational dress had less of an impact in Britain, cycling clothes became looser, lighter, warmer and more practical, with shorter skirts worn over knickerbockers. 'Lady Doctor', Miss Crosfield, recommended abandoning corsets and wearing wide shoes for comfort, Gordon Stables urged 'the fair rider' to follow the example of men who exercise, and, on returning home, to bathe and change their clothing, and both urged the adoption of woollen underwear.⁵⁵

Gordon Stables' publications reflect the ways in which individual author's opinions could also change over time, and in his case apparently dovetail with eugenicist ideas and language in the build up of anxieties about race, nation and Empire at the turn of the century. Stables appeared to subscribe to a straightforward vision of the 'fixed fund of energy' thesis during the 1880s and 1890s, recognizing the scope for incremental improvement in physique and wellbeing in all young women: 'All kinds of exercise do good; walking for the

weakly, cycling and rowing for the stronger, dumb-bells and Indian clubs before breakfast or in the afternoon for all'.⁵⁶ Though he was cautious concerning the benefits of cycling for girls, especially those under the age of fifteen, and encouraged weaker girls to use a tricycle, he lauded the cycle's overall health benefits.⁵⁷ But by 1901, likely spurred on by the stepping up of Empire rhetoric in the midst of the South African War, Stables' views shifted, and his readers warned not to 'have too much of that emancipation business'. 'Who wants a woman with biceps, anyhow?'⁵⁸ His earlier publications had encouraged girls not to stand on the sidelines but to join in the sporting endeavours of their brothers. Now he denounced girls' pursuit of 'man-games and tom-boy exercises' that would result in their loss of womanly elegance. Golf would lead to the 'ungainly and hoydenish golf stride', while hockey 'was the most hoydenish and ungraceful of all man-games and soon gains for her a figure with not more grace in it than of an oyster-wife'.⁵⁹ In a reversal of his earlier modest support of cycling for girls, and nudging close to Kenealy's assessment of the sport, he described how biking

Rolls the spine, interferes with the proper function of the hip-bones and gives the bicycle face, with its 'blintering' eyes, look of deep concern, square jaws and flabby mock-turtle cheeks. It is nice to be able to move quickly about in this age of hurry, but biking is after all but a man-game.⁶⁰

Just as youth itself, particularly girls' youth, was seen as fluid, complex and a time of opportunities and challenges, so too was girls' healthy passage through it complex and much debated.⁶¹ For many medical authors, like Stables, attitudes hardened by the early twentieth century, as medical ideas and

literature became imbued with notions of national efficiency, which were replicated in wider interest periodicals. Such periodicals presented diverse views on the limits of education and physical exertion, demonstrating the capacity of their authors and editors to contribute to both the reproduction and construction of ideas on gender and health. The impact of all this writing is difficult to measure, not least given the diversity of the viewpoints expressed by doctors – which were not neatly divided by gender or even consistent for individual authors – and the challenges of assessing what lay readers, including women and girls, actually made of medicine’s efforts to inform and instruct on matters pertaining to their health. The apparent marketability of such advice literature and the enduring popularity of the health column and articles on exercise and health intended for women and girl readers indicates, however, that they were exposed extensively to such materials in a range of general interest and specialist periodicals. What all this activity also illuminated is the eagerness of doctors to disseminate their views broadly, via an ever expanding and editorially flexible periodical literature, and to engage actively with the issues of the day, relating health and health practices to major cultural and social changes.

7,271 words

Notes

¹ Explored in Marland, *Health and Girlhood*; this article focuses on the ways in which doctors and other self-styled authorities on girls' health utilized periodical literature to convey their opinions.

² Anon., 'Women's Beauty'. The article summarized eminent psychiatrist Sir James Crichton-Browne's take on the challenges of female education for women.

³ Flint, *The Woman Reader*, 57.

⁴ Scull, MacKenzie, and Hervey, 'Degeneration and Despair'; Turner, 'Henry Maudsley'; Brock, *British Women Surgeons*; Manton, *Elizabeth Garrett Anderson*; Elston, 'Anderson, Elizabeth Garrett'.

⁵ Maudsley, 'Sex in Mind'.

⁶ Vertinsky, *The Eternally Wounded Woman*, 46.

⁷ Anderson, 'Sex in Mind'.

⁸ Flint, *The Woman Reader*, 57. For the debate and its follow up, see Burstyn, 'Education and Sex'; Newman, *Men's Ideas/Women's Realities*; Marland, *Health and Girlhood*, ch. 4.

⁹ Vann and VanArsdel (eds), *Victorian Periodicals*, 3, 7-8.

¹⁰ Van Vuuren, *Literary Research*, 145.

¹¹ Fraser, Green, and Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*.

¹² Martineau, 'How to Learn to Swim'; Hoggan, 'Cycling for Ladies'.

¹³ Marland, *Health and Girlhood*, 122-131, and for the contributions of medical practitioners to the debate on cycling 103-118.

¹⁴ See also Parratt, 'Athletic "Womanhood"', 43.

¹⁵ Beetham, *A Magazine of her Own*, preface, ix.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 89, 91.

¹⁷ Ibid., 138. See also Drotner, *English Children*; Tinkler, *Constructing Girlhood*; Mitchell, *The New Girl*.

¹⁸ For the *Girl's Own Paper (GOP)*, see Skelding, 'Every Girls' Best Friend?'; Drotner, *English Children*, ch. 10; Marland, *Health and Girlhood*, 75-82; Beetham, *A Magazine of her Own?*, ch. 9.

¹⁹ Peterson, 'Medicine'.

²⁰ Vann and VanArsdel (eds), *Victorian Periodicals*, 5.

²¹ Kingsford, *Health, Beauty and the Toilet*. See also Richardson, 'Transforming the Body Politic'.

²² Davis, 'Hygiene for Girls. Amusements', 655-660. See also Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Womanhood*, 121-122.

²³ See Marland, *Health and Girlhood*, 51-52, 75-82 for Stables' publishing exploits and the *GOP*.

²⁴ Scharlieb, 'Adolescent Girlhood', 179; Scharlieb, 'Adolescent Girls', 1015. See Jones, 'Women and Eugenics in Britain'.

²⁵ Stables, *The Girl's Own Book*, preface, 174-182.

²⁶ 'Medicus', 'The Weather and Health', 23-24.

²⁷ 'Medicus', 'Can Girls Increase their Strength?', 534.

²⁸ 'Medicus', 'Health, Strength and Beauty', 758; 'Medicus', 'Health All the Year Round', 166.

²⁹ Mitchell, *The New Girl*, 65, for citation of Nesbit, E. 'The Girton Girl', *Atalanta* 8 (1895), 755-759, on 755.

³⁰ Anon. [Linton, E. Lynn], 'The Girl of the Period', *Saturday Review* 25 (14 March 1868), 339-340. Reprinted in Linton, *The Girl of the Period*, 6, 2. See also Fraser,

Green, and Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, 32-34 for the complex gender formations taking place in *Girl of the Period Miscellany*.

³¹ Horwood, "Girls Who Arouse Dangerous Passions", 654; McCrone, *Sport and the Physical Emancipation*; Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*, 42. See also Macrae, *Exercise in the Female Life Cycle*, ch. 3 for the experiences of young girls after 1930.

³² Schofield, 'The Modern Development', 818.

³³ Imber, *Trusting Doctors*, 85-87.

³⁴ Schofield, 'Nervousness and Hysteria', 415.

³⁵ Schofield, 'Modern Hygiene in Practice', 672, 673.

³⁶ See Marland, *Health and Girlhood*, ch. 3.

³⁷ Kenealy, 'Woman as Athlete', 635, 641.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 643, 645.

³⁹ Chant, 'Woman as an Athlete'.

⁴⁰ Kenealy, 'Woman as an Athlete: A Rejoinder', 916, 920.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 924, 926, 928.

⁴² Playfair, 'The Nervous System', 221. Playfair was citing a leading article, 'The New Woman – Old Style', *The Speaker* (12 January 1895), 39-41, on 40.

⁴³ Anon., 'The Month', 111.

⁴⁴ Schofield, 'The Modern Development', 818.

⁴⁵ Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*, 54-55, Lake, 'Gender and Etiquette in British Lawn Tennis', 703-704.

⁴⁶ Schofield, 'The Cycling Craze', 185.

⁴⁷ Richardson, 'On Recreation for Girls', 546.

⁴⁸ Simpson, 'Respectable Identities', 69, 68.

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- ⁴⁹ Richardson, 'Arabella Madonna Kenealy'.
- ⁵⁰ Walker, *Beauty through Hygiene*, preface, 10, 11.
- ⁵¹ Playfair, 'Remarks on the Education'.
- ⁵² F.H. [Hird], 'Women's Work', 51.
- ⁵³ Schofield, 'On the Perfecting', 662.
- ⁵⁴ Fenton, 'A Medical View of Cycling', 797.
- ⁵⁵ Anon., 'A Lady Doctor on Cycling'; Stables, *Girls' Own Book*, 62. For dress reform and sport, see McCrone, *Sport and the Physical Emancipation*, ch. 8.
- ⁵⁶ 'Medicus', 'A Plain Talk', 597.
- ⁵⁷ Stables, *Health upon Wheels*, 43.
- ⁵⁸ Stables ('Medicus'), 'Health', 716.
- ⁵⁹ Stables ('Medicus'), 'Man-Games', 503.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 503.
- ⁶¹ See also Marland, 'Unstable Adolescence'.

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