

2001

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Mandy Treagus

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### Recommended Citation

Treagus, Mandy, The Body of the Imperial Mother: Women, Exercise and the Future of 'the Race' in Britain, 1870-1914, *Kunapipi*, 23(1), 2001.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol23/iss1/21>

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# The Body of the Imperial Mother: Women, Exercise and the Future of 'the Race' in Britain, 1870-1914

## **Abstract**

The rise of sport in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain occurred at a time when the British Empire was at its height. According to J.A. Mangan, 'A potent education ideology known as athleticism evolved in response to a late Victorian obsession with character and imperialism' (1992, 3). It was a time when the idea of Empire, and with it an understanding of the supremacy of the English race, had a great grip upon the public imagination, especially that of the middle classes. Connections between male sport and the spread and maintenance of the Empire were often made and widely believed: 'For many Victorians and Edwardians there was an obvious link between the development of endurance, toughness and courage on English playing fields and pioneering in Australia, preaching in Africa and soldiering in Burma' (Mangan 1981, 138). This connection was reinforced in school magazines where the exploits of old boys in the imperial cause were celebrated and exoticised (Mangan 1981,137). Within the constraints of Muscular Christianity, it was also assumed that team sports contributed to the development of good character, which was necessary if the Empire was to be understood as a moral, rather than economic imperative for the British.

MANDY TREAGUS

## The Body of the Imperial Mother: Women, Exercise and the Future of 'the Race' in Britain, 1870–1914

The rise of sport in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain occurred at a time when the British Empire was at its height. According to J.A. Mangan, 'A potent education ideology known as athleticism evolved in response to a late Victorian obsession with character and imperialism' (1992, 3). It was a time when the idea of Empire, and with it an understanding of the supremacy of the English race, had a great grip upon the public imagination, especially that of the middle classes. Connections between male sport and the spread and maintenance of the Empire were often made and widely believed: 'For many Victorians and Edwardians there was an obvious link between the development of endurance, toughness and courage on English playing fields and pioneering in Australia, preaching in Africa and soldiering in Burma' (Mangan 1981, 138). This connection was reinforced in school magazines where the exploits of old boys in the imperial cause were celebrated and exoticised (Mangan 1981, 137). Within the constraints of Muscular Christianity, it was also assumed that team sports contributed to the development of good character, which was necessary if the Empire was to be understood as a moral, rather than economic imperative for the British. These 'manly' characteristics could be described as 'the basic tools of imperial command: courage, endurance, assertion, control and self-control' (Mangan 1985, 18), but team sports also inculcated the obedience and loyalty needed in imperial service. Both within and outside of the school environment, sport was in its heyday, with the establishment, codification and institutionalisation of most major world sports occurring in Britain and to a lesser extent the US. While there was limited dissent regarding the benefits of male sport, this was mostly about emphasis. Public boys' schools were criticised by some for espousing the doctrine of games to the exclusion of almost all else but most Britons were in sympathy with an anonymous contributor to *Century Magazine*, who asked, in 1890,

How far may the spring in the step of the well-trained athlete project itself into the constructive energy of a people? What force, what dogged determination, may not generations of contestants in athletic sports impart to the intellectual achievements of a nation? ('Topics of the Time' 315)

While such a view was seen generally as unproblematic for boys and men, the benefits of sport where girls and women were concerned were a different matter. This was complicated by the fact that sport itself came to have such a central role in the construction of dominant modes of late-Victorian masculinity. However to the Headmistresses of the new girls' schools which developed in the late-nineteenth century, girls' sport also could be justified in part by its role in the development of character. According to Jane Frances Dove, the Principal of St Leonard's in Scotland, the 'principles of corporate life' were learnt 'nowhere more completely than ... in the large organised games, such as cricket, hockey and lacrosse' (Dove 402). St. Leonard's, like other large public schools for girls, developed a strong sporting culture which was not unlike that of the boys' schools. There were four cricket ovals, four hockey pitches (doubling as lacrosse fields), four hard tennis courts and four lawn courts (*Bystander* qtd in Green, 15). Golf and fives<sup>1</sup> were also played during the three hours that were set aside daily for exercise, while the school magazine was dominated by sport (McCrone 1987, 110–11). Dove even claimed that the girls' sporting field contributed to the Empire, with her statement that 'most of the qualities, if not all, that conduce to the supremacy of our country in so many quarters of the globe, are fostered if not solely developed by means of games' (Dove 398). To draw this connection between boys' sport and Empire was commonplace; to make it between girls' sport and Empire was quite an assertion in an era which was increasingly locked into debates concerning one predominant female role: that of 'mother of the race'.

The entry of women into higher education had evoked strong responses from the medical profession in both the US and Britain. In the US, much of the medical opposition was expressed in Edward Clarke's *Sex in Education, or, A Fair Chance for the Girls* (1873), and in Britain Henry Maudsley published an article in the *Fortnightly Review* espousing Clarke's ideas. Maudsley built much of his argument on the notion of 'energy conservation', a theory well-known in natural science and one which 'became firmly entrenched in popular science' (Atkinson 1987, 43). Herbert Spencer had expounded this idea in 1861 with his warning that 'Nature is a strict accountant and if you demand of her in one direction more than she is prepared to lay out, she balances the account by making a deduction elsewhere' (217). Though this theory was by no means confined to ideas about the female constitution, Maudsley drew on this widespread understanding that 'the energy of a human body' had a 'definite and not inexhaustible quantity' and so was able to decry all kinds of female activities with the assertion that 'When Nature spends in one direction, she must economise in another direction' (467). For Maudsley it was clear that 'women are marked out by nature [sic] for very different offices in life from those of men', the chief of these being motherhood (468). Expending their energies on intellectual pursuits would tax those limited energy reserves, rendering them unfit for reproduction and inviting unspecified 'lifelong suffering' (473). Spencer himself asserted in *Principles of Biology* that 'absolute or relative

infertility is generally produced in woman by mental labour carried to excess' (Spencer qtd in Dyhouse, 43). Ultimately, and in keeping with the evolutionist language of much of the piece, Maudsley threatens racial deterioration: 'For it would be an ill thing, if it should so happen, that we got the advantages of a quality of female intellectual work at the price of a puny, enfeebled, and sickly race. In this relation, it must be allowed that women do not and cannot stand on the same level as men' (472). In asserting the 'maternal functions' as the dominating factor in female life (478), and connecting the future of 'the race' to women's activities, Maudsley contributed to a debate which raged through the next forty years and beyond.

After this piece had appeared, there was a flurry of correspondence between a number of 'Girton pioneers' such as Louisa Lumsden, soon to become principal of St Leonard's (Atkinson 1978, 104–105). Emily Davies, founder of Girton, and Frances Buss, founder of the London Collegiate School for Girls, turned to Elizabeth Anderson to respond (McCrone 1988, 23; Atkinson 1978, 105). As a woman who had completed medical training herself, despite the many obstacles put in her way by medical men, Anderson seemed the obvious candidate to write a reply which appeared in the following *Fortnightly Review*. Maudsley, Clarke and their supporters had what amounted to an obsession with menstruation as an inhibiting factor in all female activities, claiming that it incapacitated girls and women for a full quarter of their time, precluding exercise and mental work entirely at those times. Anderson's response, after initially berating Maudsley for his lack of propriety in raising menstruation as a topic of discussion in the public sphere, was dismissive: 'The assertion that, as a rule, girls are unable to go on with an ordinary amount of quiet exercise or mental work during these periods, seems to us to be entirely contradicted by experience' (Anderson 586). She also pointed out that almost every idea in the article had come from the work of Clarke.

Clearly reflecting on her own experiences, Anderson disputed the assertion that women were contending 'on equal terms with men' as Maudsley had suggested, and pointed out that for women attempting to study medicine in Edinburgh, for example, 'an atmosphere of hostility ... has taxed their strength and endurance far more than any amount of mental work could tax it' (589). While agreeing that special care needed to be taken of developing females, Anderson described the provisions made for physical education in the new schools and colleges:

the same people who during recent years have been trying to improve the mental training of girls, have continually been protesting in favour also of physical development, and to a great extent their protests have been successful. The school-mistresses who asked that girls might share in the Oxford and Cambridge Local Examinations, were the first also to introduce gymnastics, active games, daily baths, and many other hygienic reforms sorely needed in girls' schools. (587)

The attitude of girls' educational founders is well-summarised by the opinion expressed by the feminist *Englishwoman's Review* in its overview of the debate:

We may draw out less by giving up medical training as the alarmists counsel us to do, but we can only do so to the certain injury of women's future work; or we may put in more by giving our girls a greater physical vitality to start with ... girls, as well as boys, can work hard if they play hard too. ('Physical Training' 168)

'Playing hard' was the antidote prescribed by the pioneers of women's education to the potential loss of energy through intellectual endeavour. Any possible strain from brain work was to be counteracted by vigorous physical exercise in the schools and colleges for girls and women which were springing up all over Britain. In her defense of higher education for women, Anderson denied what she saw as Maudsley's charge that female educators sought to 'change women into men' (Anderson 583) and asked, 'what body of persons associated together in England for the purpose of promoting the education of women has made any statement, in any form or degree, implying such aims?' (583). As if to affirm this, the article concludes with a claim for the maternal benefits of the new female education:

if the result be, that, by improvement in the training and education of women, as much may be hoped for their physical as for their mental development, let them, in the interests not of women only, but of the children who claim from their mothers so much more than mere existence and nurture, give to those who are labouring at this difficult work, not languid approval, but sustained and energetic support. (594)

Not only was motherhood the concern of those who resisted women's changing roles in the following decades; it was repeatedly called upon as the ultimate trump card in feminist justifications of such changes.

Maudsley had not been the first to link maternity and the future of the race with changes in the status of women. Apart from the scientific writings of Spencer, female journalists such as Margaret Oliphant and Eliza Lynn Linton had written critically of contemporary women in the late 1860s, both linking the moral state of young women 'with the race and the nation' (Boufis 110). However, as the debate progressed, it centred increasingly around questions of eugenics, inheritance, and the possibility of active intervention in social trends, especially with regard to motherhood.

The founder of eugenics was Francis Galton, whose studies of hereditary led to the publication of *Hereditary Genius* (1869) and *English Men of Science* (1874). He was concerned about the diminishing fertility of families which produced men of 'genius', not the least of which was his own line, as it ended with him (Soloway 19). While he applied his mathematical skills to questions of fertility and hereditary, he brought a particular lens to his studies which influenced their outcomes and conclusions. He 'not only assumed fertility and infertility were hereditary traits, but strongly implied that they were carried primarily by women' (Soloway 20). Even more seriously, he failed to consider women at all as persons

of genius in their own right. In the index to *Hereditary Genius* he lists: 'Women: why their names are omitted here, transmission of ability through, influence of mothers, mothers of eminent men, wives of eminent men' (Galton n.p.). According to Soloway 'the key to eugenics, a term coined by Galton in 1883 from the Greek word *eugenes*, meaning "good in birth" or "noble in hereditary", was the modification of the haphazard customs of marriage and procreation currently practiced in English society' (21). It was profoundly concerned with class, but ideally with classes of the naturally gifted. Selective breeding, such as that used in improving animal stocks, could be applied to human reproduction with the result that the numbers of talented men could be multiplied. Rather than trusting the race to the principles of natural selection through adaptation that had been demonstrated by Charles Darwin, Galton's cousin, he and the eugenists who followed him felt that the rate of environmental change in society was too great for natural adaption to occur, making intervention necessary (Soloway 22). As Galton's disciple Karl Pearson put it, 'In civilised man the survival of the fittest appears to be replaced by the survival of the most fertile, and the identification of the most fertile with the socially fittest has not yet been asserted by any statist' (Pearson 1897, 102).

The eugenists were a varied group from different political persuasions and this was nowhere more apparent than in their writings on 'the woman question', as it became known. While some were emphatically anti-feminist, others, such as Pearson, professed sympathy with efforts to procure female emancipation (1901, 361). To this end he formed the Men and Women's Club, which met between 1885 and 1889 to discuss 'sexual mores and sexual passion' (Walkowitz 37) and included such members as Olive Schreiner, Havelock Ellis, and Eleanor Marx. Pearson began proceedings by reading the paper he later published as 'The Woman's Question', in which he attempted a balanced presentation of the dominant issues of the day. Acknowledging that 'the great restrictions which are at present placed on their development are such an obvious evil', he was still hesitant about pushing for full emancipation for women (Pearson 1901, 360–61). Even at this early stage of his career, Pearson's first concerns are with the race:

We have first to settle what is the physical capacity of woman, what would be the effect of her emancipation on her function of race-reproduction, before we can talk about her 'rights', which are, after all, only a vague description of what may be the fittest position for her, the sphere of her maximum usefulness in the developed society of the future. The higher education of women may connote a general intellectual progress for the community, or, on the other hand, a physical degradation of the race, owing to prolonged study having ill effects on woman's child-bearing efficiency.

(1901, 355)

It was only later, in the early 1890s, that Pearson turned his talents to Galtonian eugenics, but already his eugenic sympathies are apparent. He makes explicit the connection between a high birth-rate and the pre-eminence of the Empire:

Those nations which have been most reproductive have, on the whole, been the ruling nations in the world's history; it is they who have survived in the battle for life. The expansion of England has depended not so much on the dull brains of the average English man or woman as upon their capacity for reproducing themselves.

(1901, 373)

Despite the apparent conservative nature of his position, Pearson's Fabian sympathies led him to suggest that the 'intellectual and physical training of single women ought to receive the special attention of the state', presumably because they could not participate in child-rearing (1901, 360). This was especially so because twenty percent of women remained single (359).

The fears concerning the race that became more and more apparent in public discourse from this time until beyond the Great War were sparked in part by low marriage and fertility rates among the middle classes. The race was breeding but not the highest specimens of it, in the view of the eugenists. The novelist Grant Allen, who promoted free unions in *The Woman Who Did* (1895), was another self-proclaimed supporter of female emancipation. Indeed, as he stated in 'Plain Words on the Woman Question' which was published in well-read journals on both sides of the Atlantic in 1889, he 'should like to see her a great deal more emancipated than she herself as yet desires' (450) but this emancipation should not preclude marrying early and having at least four children. Claiming that 'there is a danger that many of the most cultivated and able families of the English-speaking race will have become extinct', he places the blame squarely on women's higher education, which was making women 'unfit to be wives and mothers' (457).

Pearson and Allen claimed to support female emancipation; the fears of those who did not could hardly be more extreme. It was in such an atmosphere that Eleanor Sidgwick, a founder and principal of Newnham College, Cambridge, conducted a survey of former students 'of Newnham and Girton Colleges at Cambridge and of Lady Margaret Hall and Somerville Halls at Oxford' (6) in order to ascertain their health before, during and after college (6). In 1887 a committee of women associated with the colleges at Oxford and Cambridge drew up questions for the survey which in the main followed a similar study of female graduates conducted in the US in 1885 (Dyhouse 45). This was one of the earliest studies to use a 'control group' of sisters and cousins, which made the responses to questions about health, marriage and rate of child-bearing more meaningful. In reviewing the results which were published in 1890, Sidgwick claimed, 'we observe that the married students are healthier than their married sisters, - and that there are fewer childless marriages among them, that they have a larger proportion of children per year of married life, and that their children are healthier' (66). Directly addressing Allen's claims, she went on to say: 'The facts available on which to form a judgement are, as I have already said, as yet small in amount, but so far as they go they afford no support whatever to generalisations such as Mr Grant Allen's' (66). It is notable that in both the US and British studies, the



production of healthy children is taken to be the ultimate defense of women's participation in higher education's physical and mental demands.

Concerns about the fertility of the girls and women who had been through the new schools and colleges was partly fuelled by changes in their physical appearance through involvement in vigorous exercise. By the 1890s the wasp-waisted, frail and physically restrained middle-class girls of the past had become more substantial, energetic and robust, a fact noticed by social commentators in everything from cartoons to alarmed articles which proclaimed the existence of 'the neuter sex': 'We have all met with It in one variety or another, for the third sex has waxed mightily of late' ('Bohemienne' 1). Such women not only took on masculine characteristics, but made themselves 'known and dreaded of men' (1), thereby rendering them unmarriageable and unable to contribute to the race. *Woman* also reported on an article from the US on 'The Virile Girl', who 'has gone headlong into athletics. It must box, fence, run, kick, jump, not because there is any sanitary necessity for the trapeze, or the greased pole, or the brass knuckles in the boudoir, but because man in his selfish arrogance has had a monopoly of these things' ('The Virile Girl' 11). *Woman's* needs were seen to centre around the private space of the boudoir and the sexual role she was expected to pursue there. *Blackwood's* ran an article entitled 'Modern Mannish Maidens' which set out to describe which sporting activities could be considered womanly and which 'are essentially male sports and male sports only' (260). The author is especially concerned with the changes in the female form through sport, and asserts that this is producing a new type:

hard, wooden-looking, muscular, from whose figures the softness and roundness which nature usually associates with womanhood seem to have been played out. It is probable that any violent physical exercise of this kind, habitually overdone, may bring the female form to this masculine and uncomely aspect.

('Modern Mannish Maidens' 257)

The article goes on to remind the female reader that 'what man desires in a woman is contrast, not a caricature of himself' (261). Increasingly, the responsibility for the low marriage rates was being projected onto women in these attacks on female incursions into the male realm.

One of the most strident criticisms of woman's sport came in the *Nineteenth Century* (1899) from Arabella Kenealy, herself a medical doctor and committed eugenicist. Her science is rather old-fashioned; she reverts back to the old theory of limited energy used by Clarke and Maudsley, and also assumes that acquired characteristics could be passed on, though the newer hereditary theories of Pearson and others were suggesting otherwise (Soloway 42). However, she clearly states that woman's new increase in muscle mass 'must be read as a degeneration from the especial excellencies Nature planned for the type feminine' (1899, 643). According to Kenealy, 'modern woman has inordinately added to her muscle-power' (1899, 639) with what can only be viewed as 'abnormal sinews' (1899,

643). Such abnormality has its price in the limited energy equation: 'For nature knows what are the faculties whence this new muscle-energy is born. She knows it is the birthright of the babies Clara and her sister athletes are squandering. She knows it is the laboriously evolved potentiality of the race they are expending on their muscles' (1899, 643). A reply published in the following issue takes a rather contemptuous view of the piece as being 'of no value to science, or to the average sane man or woman' (Chant 746). The obvious question, 'Who has decided that it is not woman's province to be muscular?' is asked (Chant 752), but using this musculature to produce a healthy baby is the ultimate justification for an athletic body: 'Common experience, as well as reason, is on the side of the more assured safety of both mother and child when the mother is muscular and well-developed, as against that of the average puny and ill-developed one' (Chant 746). The writer is at pains to affirm her commitment to both heterosexuality and motherhood against the implied insinuation of lesbianism in athletic women, and finishes by encouraging other women to continue with sport *and* motherhood: 'So let us modern women take heart of grace, and go on doing the best we can to develop muscular vigour, along with a sneaking fondness for frills and pleatings, and an openly avowed adhesion to the Eternal Baby, and its father' (Chant 754).

The fears of Kenealy and others who attacked the sporting woman were in part a reflection of the view held by both Galton, Spencer and many of their contemporaries that the fertility of women and their ability to raise an infant could be gauged by their secondary sexual characteristics and general attractiveness to men. Galton 'had long assumed these heritable qualities would also correspond to the size of a woman's breasts' (Soloway 116), while Spencer had decried 'flat-chested girls who survive their high-pressure education' but who are unable 'to bear a well-developed infant and to supply it with the natural food for the natural period' (Spencer qtd in Dyhouse, 43). This preoccupation with breast size recurs in critiques of the New Woman, and it is a feature of Galton's unpublished eugenic fantasy fable 'Kantsaywhere', in which the 'thoroughly feminine' and 'mammalian' race heroine is considered the ideal candidate for reproduction (Galton qtd in Soloway, 67).

A number of material factors contributed to the sense of anxiety about the state of 'the race' at this time, and the publication of a translation of Max Nordau's *Degeneration* in 1895 seemed to confirm anxieties and fears about racial degeneration which had been raised over the previous two decades, in which the word was freely used. Among the middle classes, the birth rate had been falling for some time, especially with the growth of family planning, or the neo-Malthusian movement as it was called, which had been more common from the 1870s onward (Soloway 89–90). Marriage rates in the middle classes were low, and both men and women tended to marry late. While much of the blame for this was put at the feet of women, in fact the 1911 *Fertility of Marriage Census* revealed that 'fewer than 46 percent of professional men were married' (Soloway 123). Given that

there were many more women in Britain than men at this time, even eugenis generally acknowledged, as Pearson had done, that probably 20% of the female population would never marry. With the middle-class birthrate falling rapidly, the real fear of many who raised the issue of degeneration appeared to be class based. For some, the fertility of the poor was more troubling than the infertility of the middle class. William and Catherine Whetham make a direct link between the fate of the nation and this differentiation in birth rates:

In considering the causes which have led to the decline and fall of nations, it was suggested elsewhere that the decline in the birth-rate of each of the abler and more valuable sections of the community, and the increase in numbers and better chances of life of the actually feeble-minded and less effective and profitable citizens, owing to improved surroundings... may be the actual cause of the downfall of any civilisation where these phenomena are observed. (1912, 56)

The presumed negative effects of social reform and assistance were made explicit by Havelock Ellis when he argued that ‘the great social reform of the past seventy years’ had the ‘unexpected result of increasing the burden it was intended to remove’ because it actually prevented the operation of natural selection (44). The Whethams agreed: ‘we have destroyed natural selection of the old sort, “red in tooth and claw”’ (228).

A sense that city life contributed to degeneration was in part confirmed by Galton in the 1870s when he demonstrated lower fertility rates of city dwellers in comparison with the rural populace (Soloway 40). The flow of people to the cities continued however, adding to the pressures felt by the poorer sections of society, whose lives were classified and brought to the attention of the educated classes in part by *Charles Booth in his Life and Labour of the People of London (1902–04)*. Booth was questioned as part of the Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee of Physical Deterioration, published in 1904. This committee was formed due to concerns raised by the poor health of Boer War recruits (Dyhouse 46) which resulted in a 40% rejection rate in non-rural areas (Soloway 41). The conflation of anxieties regarding race and motherhood emerge in the line of questioning pursued by Commissioner Fox with Booth. Booth is told that Jewish children (Jewish immigrants had been arriving from eastern Europe from the 1880s onward) are taller and heavier than Christian children. He disclaims knowledge of this, but when it is demonstrated he becomes emphatic that it is due to their having ‘the more complete home life’, as their mothers do not work (Dyhouse 47). Not only did the eugenis want women to be more prolific breeders, but also to be more attentive mothers.

If degeneration was a reality, then regeneration was the answer. However, the motivation for anxiety about the state of the race, and the need for eugenics to regenerate it, is shown repeatedly in the writings of its advocates to originate in a contempt for the working classes and the poor. A blunt example of this is ‘The Imperial Race’, which appeared in the *Nation* in 1912. Much of the article is

spent with an unfavourable description of an English crowd on Bank Holiday. 'Can these smudgy, dirty, evil-smelling creatures compose the dominant race? ... The crowds that swarmed the Heath were not lovely things to look at', writes the anonymous author; 'How stunted, puny, and ill-developed the bodies are! How narrow-shouldered the men, how flat-breasted the women! And the faces, how shapeless and aenemic...' (45). Galton, Pearson, Ellis and others state emphatically that the best examples of the race could be found in the educated families of the middle class. This is why it was so imperative for middle-class women to keep breeding. In fact,

Using Charles Booth's ascending classification of the London population from A to X, Galton calculated that the economic and civic worth of those in the top W and X middle-class categories was thousands of times greater than those at the other end of the alphabet.... He actually thought it was feasible to make an approximate estimate of the worth of a child at birth according to the class he is destined to occupy when an adult. (Soloway 76)

In the years leading up to the Great War, the tone of the eugenists becomes increasingly urgent. The Whethams, who were impatient with much of the social organisation of their time, were especially dismissive of 'the cult of games': 'had this excessive interest in games and sport been confined to men ... it might have been less disastrous' (1909, 196). Rather, women are viewed as 'capital, to be spent sparingly in the present, to be husbanded carefully for the future' (199). Because motherhood is the most important work undertaken by women, any 'external activities are a direct menace to the future welfare of the race' (198). Murray Leslie considered 'Woman's Progress in Relation to Eugenics' in the *Eugenics Review*, asking, 'Are the new women with their larger outlook on life and its problems better fitted than the older types to become the mothers of a stronger and more virile race, able to keep England in its present proud position among the nations of the world? ... is she a better mother of the race?' (283). To ensure that women had the necessary number of children, eugenists advocated early marriage. Leslie even suggests that education be put off until after the 'active reproductive life lies behind', when there is 'less risk' (288). The Whethams state that four children is the minimum necessary to maintain the race (1912, 35); Leslie goes further with his claim that 'the quality of the child improves up to the sixth or seventh', especially if there is 'no lengthy period of sterility' in between as these lower 'the quality of the child born subsequently' (293). In Leslie's view, only selfishness prevents women from fulfilling their duty to race, nation and empire. Despite claiming that the 'improved physical physique of the modern woman is largely the result of regulated physical training', Dr Leslie has little time for games. He cites Dr Ballantyne from the US who 'has noticed a lack of capacity in young athletic women to nurse their babies, and instances the case of a woman hockey player who had informed him of the fact that nearly all her fellow players had the experience after marriage of being unable to suckle their

infants' (Leslie 287). Likewise, though she wanted to avoid condemning young women to 'any but the most desultory occupations', Mary Scharlieb, another eugenicist doctor, feared 'that excessive devotion to athletics and gymnastics tends to produce what may perhaps be called the "neuter" type of girl ... flat-chested, with a badly developed bust, her hips are narrow and in too many instances there is a corresponding failure in function' (Scharlieb qtd in Fletcher, 27–28). Her recommendation of the moral and physical benefits of *milder* 'physical culture' was based on her commitment to imperialism: 'Ours is a people which has been commissioned to carry the lamp of light and learning to the uttermost parts of the earth ... That we may be worthy, it behoves us to perfect the spirit, mind and body of every man and every *woman* of our imperial race' (Scharlieb qtd in Davin, 21).

The effect of this pressure regarding motherhood was that the proponents of exercise for women were forced to continually justify their actions in the terms set by eugenicists. The most public of these debates occurred around the issue of cycling, with even non-eugenicist doctors judging all activities in terms of their supposed effects on motherhood. The fact that most of these assertions lacked any scientific basis did not stop the medical profession, or indeed anyone at all, from presuming to set limits on women's behaviour. That these assertions were often made under the influence of prevailing fashion is also clear. As the *Englishwoman's Review* noted wryly in 1896, 'It is doubtful which has been most rapid, the adoption of cycling by women, or the change of tone respecting it' ('Cycling for Women' 226). In short, when upper-class women took up cycling, the medical profession was prepared to endorse it. The reassertion of women's biological functions with regard to reproduction can be seen as a highly anxious reaction to their changing position in the late-Victorian and Edwardian worlds. It was a reassertion that was made not only by those resisting female emancipation but also by its supporters and all those in between. With such continual affirmation of woman's mothering role, and its primacy in securing the future of the imperial race and its empire, it is not surprising that by the 1920s women who rejected heterosexual marriage and motherhood were far more marginalised than they had been a generation earlier (Smith-Rosenberg). Boundaries for women's participation in vigorous exercise were continuing to shift, but a reaffirmation of reproduction occurred at the same time. A corresponding lessening in female political activity occurred, and as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has shown, 'only the "unnatural" woman continued to struggle with men for economic independence and political power' (283). To the eugenicists, Kenealy's claim that 'The pregnant woman is, moreover, pregnant with the destiny of Races' still held true (1920, 197).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Fives is a small court game in which the ball is hit by the hand.

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