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Lack of Harmony:
About the Construction of
Femininity and Sport Around 1900

Modern sport has frequently been interpreted as a masculine project. often with the conception that sport is more suitable for men than for women. In the paper I argue that sport has no sex. that the barriers set up for women who wanted to participate in sport were related to the medical arguments but perhaps belonged more to the cultural

norms of the time, and that female teachers have played a serious role in the formation of a restrictive femininity. Women's breakthrough into modern sport at the end of the nineteenth century coincided with the construction of femininity, or particular norms about women. My main question is: Has sport influenced the picture of femininity and in what ways?

This construction was based on the attempts of evolutionary and medical theory to throw light on the question of sex, and it produced a new sexual ideology, central to which was the notion of a woman as a biological category: the female sex. The construction of femininity as natural and unchangeable helped to set up barriers for women who wanted to take part in sport. But many women nevertheless took up the challenge and through practical, lived *reality* helped call into question the identical construction of both sport and femininity.

Sportswomen made women visible in different ways, including as active participants in the development of modern society. They showed that norms of femininity were ideological and demonstrated the complexities of the relationship between sport and femininity. This study combines theory and empiricism to examine this issue by concentrating on the pioneers of women's sport in Denmark.