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## **Physical Activity and Women in the French Speaking Community of Québec (1880-1930)**

The issue of women in sports has been addressed for decades and many authors have documented the slow process of their participation in physical activity and tried to understand the justification for restrictions put upon women with regard to physical activity. In education, and especially from the latter part of the nineteenth century to the 1930s the same type of argumentation curtailed girls' physical education. Both the educational community and the medical profession put forward physiological arguments and cultural beliefs to prevent women from participating in strenuous exercise thus maintaining the "fair sex" in a relatively sedentary condition. Many researchers have studied this problem: Patricia Vertinsky and Helen Lenskyj for Canada, Paul Atkinson for Britain, Roberta Park for America, and Gilbert Andrieu for France. The present study is in this vein and examines

how the French speaking, catholic and clergy controlled society in Quebec reacted to the idea of promoting physical activity for women. What arguments did physicians use to justify and at the same time limit the practice of sports and physical education for females? What was the catholic church's attitude towards women's participation in sport and how did its moral values influence the development of physical education?

It appears that physicians promoted physical exercise for women only for the sake of health and thus perpetuated the notions of their limited physical capacities. They reinforced social beliefs that women should be entirely devoted to motherhood. Meanwhile the clergy, initially considering sport as a threat to catholic morality and a risk of cultural contamination, was more prone to recommend gymnastics for girls and played a role in introducing physical education in the schools of Quebec.

The research includes sources from the medical field such as medical manuals and especially books on public health published by physicians such as Dr. Lachapelle and Dr Paradis. The resources for the clerical arguments include guides for Christian education, pedagogical manuals and various official documents. This material allows a very interesting comparison between the two different cultural communities of the province of Québec from the point of view of women's involvement in sport and physical activity.



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