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Eternally Wounded Women: Women, Doctors and Exercise in the Late Nineteenth Century

Patricia A Vertinsky

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In the late 19th century, male doctors played a major role in shaping attitudes toward the physical capabilities of middle-class women. Women, too, wrote about their particular concerns for health and physical exercise as well as experiences with their doctors. Traditional views concerning the eternally wounded woman and the kinds of exercise necessary to fit her for healthy womanhood demonstrated remarkable resilience despite claims that the "new woman" would render the "anatomy is destiny" argument obsolete. This book examines the debate about women and exercise from the points of view of the male medical establishment, the early pioneer female doctors, intellectual feminism and the developing profession of psychology. A special focus is placed upon the cautionary, and sometimes misogynous, nature of medical prescriptions of exercise for the ageing woman.

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