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Act Like a Lady?: Dr. Mary Jo Moriarty's Scrapbooks of Women in Sports at the Sargent School and Camp Howes

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Abstract: Since the late nineteenth century, women have redefined ideals of femininity, especially within the realm of sports and physical education. In post-Civil War American society, women were deemed “professional homemakers” who ruled the domestic realm. All other realms were ruled by men, especially sports. By the early twentieth century President Theodore Roosevelt proposed a philosophy that sports could be used to define manliness. He believed aggressive sports could recreate the brawn, the spirit, the self-confidence, and quickness of men. As a result, sports became a “rite of passage” to manhood (Hult and Trekell 1991). On the contrary, the Victorian “cult of true womanhood” and medical opinions discouraged

women from participating in sports. The “spirit of femininity” was not associated with the aggressiveness and competitiveness of sports. Moreover, physicians suggested it would be harmful to reproduction and a women’s frail nervous system (Hult and Trekell 1991). Despite these beliefs, as Dr. Mary Jo Moriarty’s historical scrapbooks of Sargent School and Camp Howes document, “New Women” redefined femininity in the early twentieth century by breaking physical fitness records, responding to publicity, wearing pants and loose-fitting clothes, and participating in a variety of competitive and aggressive sports. These ideals can also be seen through the movie, *A League of Their Own* portraying the establishment of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League in the 1940s. Ultimately, these accomplishments did the groundwork for women to participate in professional sports and the Olympics, and helped justify the mandatory equitable opportunity laws, like Title IX, that broadened women’s and girls’ participation in high school and collegiate sports. Although women have come a long way in redefining femininity in physical education, play, clothing and sports competition, there are, unfortunately, unfair societal pressures and perceptions continue to exist.

Keywords: Dr. Mary Jo Moriarty; women’s physical education; women’s sports; Sargent School; Bridgewater State University’s Camp Howes

Since the late nineteenth century, women have redefined ideals of femininity, especially in sports and physical education. In post-Civil War American society, women were deemed “professional homemakers” who ruled the domestic realm. All other realms were ruled by

men, especially sports. By the early twentieth century, President Theodore Roosevelt proposed a philosophy that sports could be used to define manliness. He believed aggressive sports could recreate the brawn, the spirit, the self-confidence, and quickness of men. As a result, sports became a “rite of passage” to manhood (Hult and Trekell 1991). On the contrary, the Victorian “cult of true womanhood” and medical opinions discouraged women from participating in sports. The “spirit of femininity” was not associated with the aggressiveness and competitiveness of sports. Moreover, some physicians suggested it would be harmful to reproduction and a women’s frail nervous system (Hult and Trekell 1991).

From 1890 to 1920 a “New Woman” movement took place. Many women stepped beyond traditional roles of wife and mother and moved into professions such as factory workers, as well as in clerical, and salesperson jobs. Moreover, women started fighting for the right to vote. As they measured up to the challenges that were set before them, it became clear that reaching their new goals would require them to develop new strengths both physically as well as mentally. “This contributed to a significant shift in the standard view of womanhood, trading fragility for determined tenacity” (Grundy et al. 2005, 11). One place in which women made modest gains toward equality was in higher education.

By 1920, females constituted about 47 percent of college undergraduates and by 1940 women’s total enrollment had more than doubled, reaching about 6,000 (Verbrugge 2012). As a result, woman’s sports and recreation increased in colleges through events known as “Play Days.” Play Days were designed to be “purely for recreational purposes ... demonstrating

the joy of hard play without bitter rivalry” (Verbrugge 2012, 103) by engaging in activities such as basketball, tennis, croquet, and archery. Ultimately, Play Days were a more acceptable form of women’s sporting experience that kept them separate from the competitive, aggressive masculine sporting experience. Bridgewater State Teachers College also participated in “Play Days” and “Sports Days” for women in the World War II era; however, women there did not have any intercollegiate competition or coaches for the women’s teams (Comeau 1997).

World War II also affected enrollment at Hyannis State Teachers College and Bridgewater State Teachers College to the point where even the professors had to leave the college to go serve in the war. As a result, Hyannis State Teachers College eventually merged with Bridgewater State Teachers College in 1944. “The impact of the second World War on enrollment at Bridgewater State Teachers College can be easily seen by comparing the enrollment in the academic year 1943-44, 296 students, 273 women and 4 men to that of 1937-38, when there were 590 students, 457 women and 133 men” (Comeau 1997, 34). Though enrollment was low and predominantly female, a camping program from Hyannis State Teachers College named Camp Howes was, fortunately, retained by Bridgewater State Teachers College. The camping sessions were held on a beautiful estate in Hyannis, Massachusetts each June and September from 1943 until 1948, and all Bridgewater State Teacher College female students majoring in health and physical education were required to attend. These camp sessions included a variety of activities such as swimming, boating, sailing, archery, tennis, softball, track and field, volleyball, soccer, and

speedball. All organization and instruction of classes were carried on by upperclassmen under the personal supervision of the camp director, Dr. Mary Jo Moriarty (Comeau 1997).

Mary Jo Moriarty's was a graduate of Villa Maria College and Boston University's Sargent School before becoming a professor at Hyannis State Teachers College and later Bridgewater State Teachers College. At Bridgewater, she taught as a professor in the Physical Education Department, and later served as chairwoman of the Physical Education Major and the Department of Health and Physical Education until she retired in 1970. Her noteworthy legacy is upheld through the naming of the "Dr. Mary Jo Moriarty Pool," which is still currently in use at the school's Kelly Gymnasium. There are two historical scrapbooks held in the Bridgewater State University Archives and Special Collections Department that originated with her. The first scrapbook documents her time at Boston University's Sargent School and the second scrapbook documents her camp sessions from 1943 to 1948 at Camp Howes in Hyannis, Massachusetts. Ultimately, both scrapbooks provide robust evidence of women redefining ideals of femininity.

Beginning in 1929, the Sargent School was the first physical education degree program offered at Boston University. The Sargent School scrapbook consists of many newspaper clippings and photographs of Sargent School female students beating the odds, getting the highest ratings and breaking records in the 1930s. One specific newspaper clipping, shown below, displays a 5-foot 4-inch, 115-pound female student named Elsie Aulenbach lifting 800 pounds. This was the highest total lift ever recorded for a female in

thousands of tests. As a result, she made the front-page headline in a Boston newspaper stating, "Sargent Girls Are Stronger Than Football Players."

Though the newspaper article compared Elsie Aulenbach's 800-pound performance to a lift scores recorded by to a football player, her physical fitness index was of a greater efficiency level physically than any other. Still, the press's attention was not welcome. Sargent students developed a petition that read "We, the undersigned, wish to state that we have come to Sargent to become physical educators and not to be set forth ads front page examples of brute strength." The Sargent girls were interested in the physical education end of their studies and in the phases of the work that developed ladies and not the "proverbial Amazons" as the press had portrayed them.

Ultimately, the Sargent School females believed that society had the wrong interpretation of strength and physical fitness tests concerning females and objected to the unfavorable commentary about the strength and physical fitness tests conducted at the school (see figure one). Women during this time were tentatively redefining femininity. They wanted to be viewed as strong; however, they were also hesitant of being viewed as "proverbial amazons" or those whose fitness somehow compromised their femininity. Nonetheless, the scrapbook includes some funny cartoon newspaper clippings in response to this issue (see figure two). These drawings portray the unfair perceptions and pressures of society concerning female strength and femininity. All in all, the Sargent's School scrapbook shows women redefining ideals of femininity by challenging the way society viewed them as physical beings.

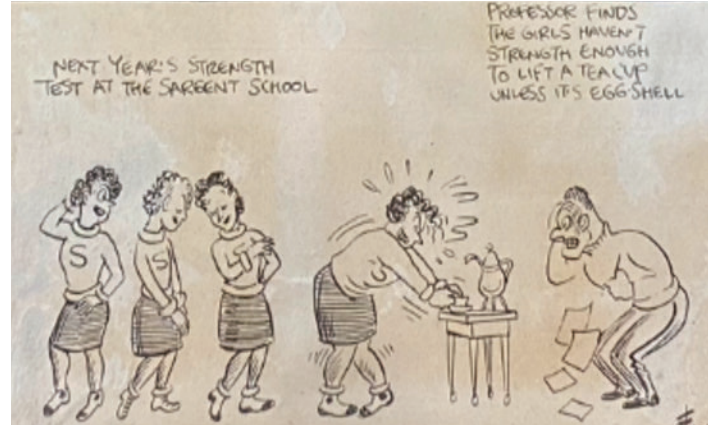
Figure 1: Strength Test



Figure 2: Sargent School Girls Protest Strength Test



Figure 3: Next Year's Strength Test



Another scrapbook compiled by Dr. Moriarty documents the camp life of women at Camp Howes from 1943 to 1948. It consists of a plethora of pictures, curriculum, and schedules that exhibit the changing ideals of femininity from year to year. At first glance, there is observable learning taking place; however, no competition or aggressiveness is apparent. The environment appears less strenuous and was very controlled. Moreover, it seems as though the required uniform for the female students at Camp Howes was a combination of shorts and a skirt (skort) because many of the early pictures have women wearing them (see figure 4). However, as the years progressed, the curriculum became more competitive and the pictures showed more women wearing pants, shorts, and loose-fitting clothes while participating in physical activities.

Figure 4: Dr. Moriarty's Scrapbook from Camp Howes, 1943 to 1948.



In the early years of Camp Howes, the curriculum documented in this scrapbook has no specific evidence of contact sports or even legitimate competition. As seen below, the early curriculum consisted of golf, tennis, archery, track, lifesaving, boating, swimming, and handicraft. Handicraft has its roots in the domestic realm as part of the traditional feminine ideal (see figure 5). However, by 1945, the curriculum consisted of more competitive and contact sports such as field ball, speedball, and soccer. Moreover, by 1946, even more competitive and aggressive sports had been added to the curriculum such as boat races, volleyball, and softball (see figure 6). All in all, the transformation of the curriculum into a more competitive and aggressive style and the transformation of clothing into a looser, more athletic style were direct reflections of the women at Camp Howes redefining the ideals of femininity to suit their needs.

Ultimately, the historical scrapbooks of the Sargent School and of Camp Howes help us understand more clearly the history of women in physical education and sports. The scrapbooks show documents and pictures of women, such as Dr. Moriarty herself, who were gradually redefining ideals of femininity. They did so by challenging society's interpretation of their abilities and how they were perceived through strength and physical testing, sporting attire, and competitive sports.

Though these women were continually expanding their realms and redefining ideals of femininity, they were definitely not treated equally. "In examining the history of physical activity in the United States during the 1930s and 1940s, it's clear that the expectations and development of men and women were treated differently" (Ellner 2020, 2). Men were expected to participate in sports in a competitive, aggressive manner and were ultimately taken more seriously than women. Women's sports were purposely less challenging and performed in a less strenuous, controlled environment. The idea of competition and a competitive spirit contradicted what was historically believed to be feminine. Moreover, cultural views of women in the 1930s and 1940s saw participation in strenuous physical activity and sports as "un-lady like." Thankfully, women who challenged the rules about appropriate feminine behavior, like the women at Sargent School and Camp Howes, encouraged equitable opportunities and equitable success in physical education and sport in the generations that followed them (Ellner 2020).

Women were not only treated differently in their physical ability to compete in sports but in their

physical appearance while competing in sports as well. There was a constant need for women to appear graceful, elegant, and feminine even while participating in physical activity. This was enforced at Camp Howes as well with the required “skort” uniforms. Though there are several photographs of women wearing trousers (which challenged the views of femininity), most of the photographs had all of the campers in skort uniforms. Clothing alterations for women’s physical activity started in small details such as a shortened skirt or a looser corset, sportier hat etc. and were first limited to private lawns and playing fields. Eventually, sportswear for women spread to colleges, and was seen in the movies by wider audiences, gaining wider acceptance (Warner 2013). Nevertheless, what women wore and how beautiful they were deemed to be played a huge role on their ability to be successful in sports.

The scrapbooks from Sargent’s School and Camp Howes resonate with images produced in *A League of Their Own*, a 1992 film directed and produced by Penny Marshall. This film tells a story about the start of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League during World War II, due to most of the men being sent to war. The women played competitive baseball games but had to do it while wearing skorts, similar to those worn by the women at Camp Howes.

Furthermore, the ideal that women should look and act a certain way to be considered successful has been ever-present in history. This was present in the film when a scout initially turned down a prolific baseball player, Marla Hooch, at tryouts because he perceived her as unattractive. Moreover, all the female baseball players were required to attend a beauty and charm school where they learned to master feminine

traits. Tellingly, one scene in the film shows a newsreel in which the female baseball players are powdering their noses, serving coffee to men, and knitting on the field and in the dugout. This is comparable to the controversial newspaper headline and backlash issue in the Sargent School’s scrapbook. Women were highly encouraged by each other and society to maintain a traditional, historic feminine visage while simultaneously redefining ideals of femininity.

In conclusion, women have been gradually proving themselves worthy of equitable competition because they have been redefining ideals of femininity since before the beginning of the twentieth century. “Between the world wars, women had to accommodate a great cultural shift and the college campuses variously created, invigorated and absorbed these cultural shifts” (Lowe 2003, 105). As a result, the female students started to conceptualize their individual body images through these new ideals of femininity. Dr. Moriarty’s historical scrapbooks of the Sargent School and Camp Howes document this by showing women breaking physical fitness records, responding to publicity, wearing pants and loose-fitting clothes and participating in a variety of competitive and aggressive sports. These ideals can also be seen through the movie portraying the establishment of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. Ultimately, these great paradigms eventually aided in the freedom for women to participate in professional sports and the Olympics and helped justify the mandatory equitable opportunity laws, like Title IX, that broadened women’s and girls’ participation in high school and collegiate sports. Although women have come a long way in redefining femininity in physical education, play, clothing and

sports competition, there are, unfortunately, unfair societal pressures and perceptions continue to exist.

Note on Author: Deborah Benson was born in Lynn, Massachusetts. In 2006, after graduating from Lynn Classical High School, she enlisted in the United States Marine Corps (USMC) and served ten honorable years of active-duty service. While in the USMC, she completed a successful combat deployment to Afghanistan and received a Combat Action Ribbon for performing her duties while under enemy fire. She also served as a Drill Instructor at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in Parris Island, SC where she transformed hundreds of civilians into United States Marines. After being honorably discharged in 2016, she started her college education at Salem State University. After about a year and a half, she had a daughter and relocated to New Bedford, where she continued her education at Bridgewater State University. While attaining her bachelor's degree at BSU, she worked as a security guard at New Bedford High School. While attaining her master's degree at BSU, she had another daughter and began working as an Adapted Physical Education (APE) at the Schwartz School in Dartmouth.

Currently, she is still working at the Schwartz School as an APE teacher teaching students ages 3 to 22 years old with multiple disabilities and complex medical needs. She possesses a great passion to teach students how to become the healthiest, strongest versions of themselves, physically, mentally, and socially. She is an advocate for student centered learning, inclusion, and the universal design for learning. Her goal is to create a positive change in the lives of her students as well as our community as a whole.

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