

## Development of Women's Sports and Women's Sports Trousers

*What is Appropriate for the "Fair Sex"? – Amazonian Costume: Ladies on Horseback – From the Gymnastic Dress to the Leotard – Trouser Suits as Activity Wear: Conquerors of the Mountains, Diana's Clothing, Hiking Costumes, Ice Costumes, Winter Sports Suits for Ladies – Cyclists Dressed in Trousers*



The bourgeois woman of the first half of the 19th century, excluded from working and professional life, spent her everyday life sitting in a domestic atmosphere, waiting, embroidering, reading, writing, making music, representing - and not infrequently bedridden, nursing her illnesses. Virtuousness and physical inactivity seemed to be indissolubly interwoven. Doctors had already criticised the sedentary behaviour of the ladies. Yet, dependent on achieving and maintaining a social status dictated by men, middle-class women for many decades were unable to break away from the female ideal of a decorative, fragile figure shaped by whalebone and to develop their own vital physicality.

Primarily out of concern for the constitutionally unstable condition of women, the socially granted scope of movement was expanded slowly during the 19th century, first for girls, then for women in general. The boundaries of what was morally acceptable were constantly redrawn, what was once considered to be offensive gradually became the norm and what was immoral became customary. The history of women's sports and thus women's sportswear documents the change in the ideal of women, the gradual detachment from fragile passivity to vitality, resilience and performance.

Restrictions on movement and dress codes were interdependent, i. e. the development of women's sports and acceptable sportswear, which was deemed appropriate and permissible, formed a unit. If one of the components was changed, this would inevitably lead to changes in the other. Callisthenics, gymnastics and athletic exercises opened up fields of activity for women that allowed them to experiment with leisure dress, which was later adopted as part of everyday dress. As the trend towards the expansion of female activity rapidly progressed, changes in the field of sport always also represented expansions in the sense of the development of freedom, towards a redefinition of female physicality.

Even around 1900, the majority of German gymnastics teachers rejected so-called "popular exercises" such as running, jumping and throwing for girls. Running hard was considered unseemly, jumping hard was

considered harmful to the abdominal organs. In other countries, especially the United States and England, such restrictions were already a thing of the past.

In fact, a profound change in the basic attitude towards women's rights and duties began throughout Europe at this time. In the course of the economic and social restructuring of society as a whole, the social position of women changed and so did the expectations placed on them. In the field of sport, gender-related demarcations became less and less important. The changed way of thinking was also reflected in curricula, e.g. the implementation regulations of the Prussian girls' secondary school system of 1909. Callisthenics and jumping styles leading to dance became a minor matter, the new gymnastics was geared towards performance. Even adult women from middle-class circles began to do gymnastics, something that would have been unthinkable for reasons of decency just a short time before.

In 1913, there was no longer any doubt that the female sex was not only allowed to perform all gymnastic exercises such as deep lifting, lifting, spreading and straddling the legs during barre gymnastics etcetera, but were also allowed to participate in almost all sporting disciplines. The healthiest and, from a moral point of view, most "impeccable" sporting activities were generally considered to be swimming, walking, sunbathing and air bathing, as well as gymnastics. And in the course of the socially sanctioned expansion of the female radius of action in the field of sport, women of Western cultures put on their trousers again *coram publico* for the first time.

The development of women's sport and women's sportswear is traced in the book for the following activities on the basis of numerous, hitherto mostly unexplored primary sources, especially statutes, tracts, bulletins, international print media and contemporary illustrations:

- Equestrians
- Gymnasts
- Mountaineers
- Hunters
- Winter sports enthusiasts
- Cyclists

Text: © Gundula Wolter. For notes see Hosen, weiblich.

Picture credit: Hosen, weiblich, Fig. 91: Skiläuferin, um 1905. In: Max Schneider: Schneeschuhe und Schlitten für Sport, Jagd und Verkehr, Berlin 1905, S. 2. Private archive.