

entitled 'Influence on Women of Special Brain-Work,' published by the *London Lancet* in 1881, and reviewed in the *American Journal of Insanity*, the following argument was made. Besides the fact that 'the higher education of women is radically an economic mistake,' excessive study by women involved 'destruction and exhaustion of intellectuality.' The neurotic predisposition of children of highly cultivated parents was cited as evidence here. Hence, it was essential that the female 'be trained for the development of *capacity* – that is receptivity' rather than be pushed in alternate directions through formal education, for:

Experience seems to show that special brain-work, on the part of the mother, exhausts the energy of brain-development – or reproduction – which, if conserved, would express itself in the mental perfection of her male offspring. The operation of the law of 'development by work' – universal in its application under normal conditions – seems to be suspended when the work done is the result of a concentration of energy, by which force is drawn off from centres other than those thrown into special activity.

Commenting on the *Lancet* article, the review continued:

The article does not question the educability of women to the level of men in any particular direction, the greater pliability of the female mind seeming to render it, indeed, all the more susceptible of special achievements. It insisted, however, that 'the possible is not always the prudent,' and, in conclusion, raises a warning voice against jeopardizing the feminine stock and the entire race by encouraging women to stray beyond their appointed sphere, for the sake of mere ephemeral distinction – a mischief which can not but eventuate in increase of mental enfeeblement and insanity.

In summary, this glance at Victorian psychiatry appears to indicate that medical breakthroughs, such as the ovariectomy, were strongly influenced by the Victorian motherhood stereotype held by this male profession. The use of surgery and instruments like the ovary compressor were indeed horrendous and based on spurious 'scientific' grounds. Ironically, these 'treatments' were performed by well-meaning and otherwise responsible medical men who confused social definitions of reality with medical truth.

*The extensive footnotes to this article have been omitted because of space constraints. For more information, contact Rainer Baehre, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton.*

## Recess

They have already dressed  
the boys in dull colours  
that 'won't show the dirt'  
and the girls in red snowsuits  
over pastel dresses  
The schoolyard is paved because lawns  
where children play become ragged  
with baseball diamonds  
Hopscotch they play jumping  
from chalk square  
to chalk square  
gossip or skip endlessly  
over patent ropes  
Willingly  
or surrounded helplessly  
girls display their panties  
But running games are forbidden  
(Falls on asphalt can be so severe)  
Red Rover has gone, the rough-house  
of Statue, tag, Mr. Wolf  
Between asphalt and sky  
three Frost fences  
and a brick wall  
They take their prescribed exercise  
in the lockstep of childhood  
And they call this recess  
an intermission this space  
between two bells?  
I call it the main event

**Merle Wallis Bolick**