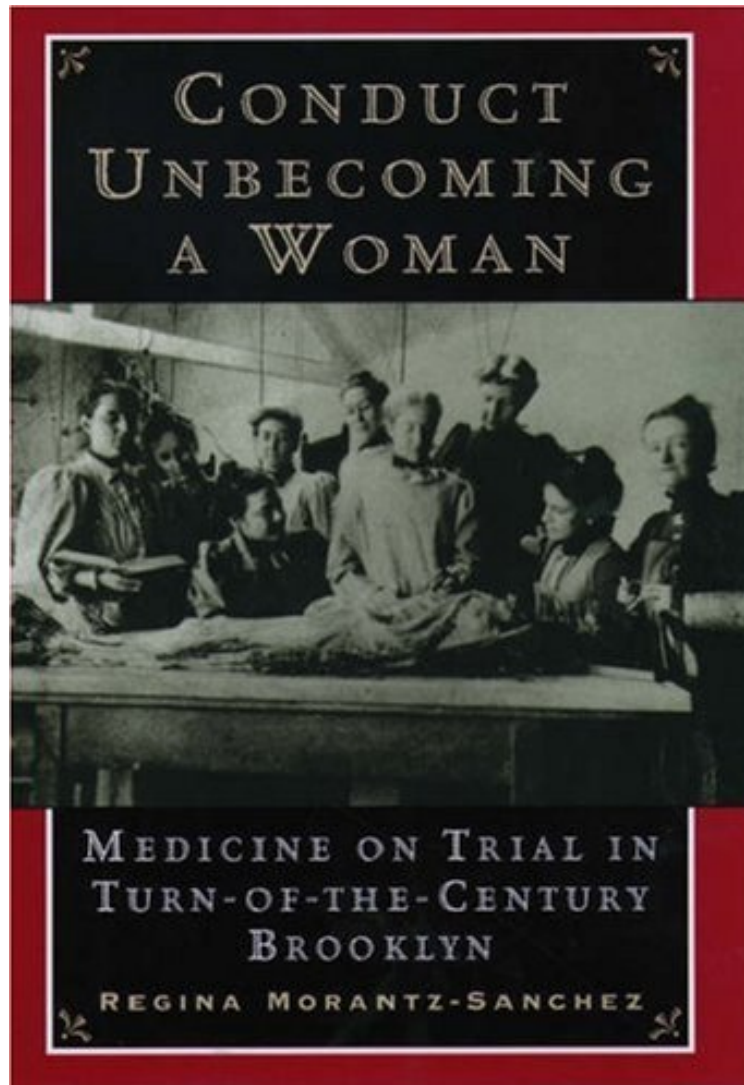


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Conduct Unbecoming a Woman: Medicine on Trial in Turn-of-the-Century Brooklyn

Regina Morantz-Sanchez
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Regina Morantz-Sanchez : Conduct Unbecoming a Woman: Medicine on Trial in Turn-of-the-Century Brooklyn before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Conduct Unbecoming a Woman: Medicine on Trial in Turn-of-the-Century Brooklyn:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Interesting BookBy Monica GramlingHaven't finished it yet, So far its very interesting, It is in great conditon and arrived on time. It reads well for non-fiction.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Goshen ind 1935 yearbook and Conduct unbecoming a woman, both excellent.By Richard

Exactly what I expected 10 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Engagingly and flawlessly argued by Nicholas L. Syrett Morantz-Sanchez has written a compelling account not just of the "crimes" and trial of Mary Dixon-Jones, but more importantly, it seems to me, an account of the times that allowed for the events to take place at all. Her analysis of the professionalization of gynecology, the place of surgery within that profession, and particularly the role of women within medicine is impeccable. Beyond that, however, Morantz-Sanchez offers a nuanced reading of late nineteenth-century Brooklyn, especially in comparison to its larger and more cosmopolitan neighbor, Manhattan. This analysis allows the reader to understand the relation Dixon-Jones had with her own neighbors and with the culture of Brooklyn at the time. She also does a great job situating the role that an evolving press played not only in the coverage of the "crimes" and the trial, but in the construction of Dixon-Jones' supporters and detractors. Throughout, Mary Dixon-Jones emerges as a truly fascinating character, a woman obsessed with success, a woman who knew how to get it. *Conduct Unbecoming a Woman* definitely is a story of "True Crime." But it is so much more than that. Marshaling a truly astounding amount of evidence in a really seamless fashion, Morantz-Sanchez shows the reader why the trial mattered, why it happened in the first place, and what it can tell us about much larger historical questions (of women professionals, of medicine at the turn of the century, of the emergence of the science of pathology, of Brooklyn and Manhattan). In that sense the book is not just entertaining (though it is that...), it's important.

In the spring of 1889, a burgeoning Brooklyn newspaper, the *Daily Eagle*, printed a series of articles that detailed a history of midnight hearses and botched operations performed by a scalpel-eager female surgeon named Dr. Mary Dixon-Jones. The ensuing avalanche of public outrage gave rise to two trials--one for manslaughter and one for libel--that became a late nineteenth-century sensation. Vividly recreating both trials, Regina Morantz-Sanchez provides a marvelous historical whodunit, inviting readers to sift through the evidence and evaluate the witnesses. *Conduct Unbecoming a Woman* is mesmerizing as an intricately crafted suspense novel. Jars of specimens and surgical mannequins became common spectacles in the courtroom, and the roughly 300 witnesses that testified represented a fascinating social cross-section of the city's inhabitants, from humble immigrant craftsmen and seamstresses to some of New York and Brooklyn's most prestigious citizens and physicians. Like many legal extravaganzas of our own time, the Mary Dixon-Jones trials highlighted broader social issues in America. It unmasked apprehension about not only the medical and social implications of radical gynecological surgery, but also the rapidly changing role of women in society. Indeed, the courtroom provided a perfect forum for airing public doubts concerning the reputation of one "unruly" woman doctor whose life-threatening procedures offered an alternative to the chronic, debilitating pain of 19th-century women. Clearly an extraordinary event in 1892, the cases disappeared from the historical record only a few years later. "*Conduct Unbecoming a Woman*" brilliantly reconstructs both the Dixon-Jones trials and the historic panorama that was 1890s Brooklyn.

In the winter of 1892, Dr. Mary Amanda Dixon Jones sued the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* for libel. The suit stemmed from a series of articles that questioned Dixon Jones's ethics, honesty, and abilities as a surgeon; so inflammatory were they that two manslaughter indictments and eight malpractice suits followed their publication. Exonerated on all counts, Dixon Jones sought restitution from her journalistic accusers. *Conduct Unbecoming a Woman* is the story of that now-forgotten trial, as compelling as any modern courtroom drama. In America, heavily publicized court trials often serve as bellwethers of coming social change. The legal battles of Mary Amanda Dixon Jones helped both to define the role of women physicians at the end of the 19th century and to legitimize the field of gynecology within the medical establishment. But *Conduct Unbecoming a Woman* is not only a medical/legal drama; it's also a tale of a city, Brooklyn, desperately seeking to retain its cosmopolitan identity as nearby Manhattan encroaches, plus a look at the newspaper business in the era of yellow journalism. Regina Morantz-Sanchez, a professor at the University of Michigan, is an expert on the historical role of women in medicine, having explored the subject in two previous books, *In Her Own Words: Oral Histories of Women Physicians and Sympathy and Science*. --Patrizia DiLucchio
From Booklist
Mary Dixon Jones began reading medicine in 1845. The 17-year-old went on to obtain a college degree and eventually two medical degrees. She established the first women's hospital in Brooklyn when it was still a separate city. In 1889 the *Brooklyn Eagle* published a sensational series pillorying her as a knife-mad surgeon and an unwomanly physician. In 1892 a jury declared her innocent of the manslaughter of one of her patients, but in 1893 she lost a libel suit against the *Eagle*. Morantz-Sanchez's thoughtfully written, thoroughly documented book deals with much more than the bare bones of Dixon Jones' story. She examines Dixon Jones as a woman who did not bow down to society's expectations of gender roles, scrutinizes the attitudes of the public and of medical men and women toward such a woman, and inspects Brooklyn's self-representation as a family-oriented, pure city in contrast to sinful, crime-ridden New York. This is the third excellent book on women in medicine from Morantz-Sanchez. William Beatty
From Kirkus
A heavily documented account of a sensational 1890 murder trial and subsequent lawsuit involving a female gynecological surgeon, recounted in academic prose thick enough to thwart all but the most persistent. In 1889, the *Brooklyn Eagle* ran a series of negative features on 61-year-old Mary Amanda Dixon-Jones, a successful surgeon at

the small Woman's Hospital of Brooklyn. The newspaper charged the doctor with a potpourri of offenses ranging from financial corruption to superfluous surgeries to mayhem in the operating room; a grand jury then indicted her for manslaughter and murder. After a six-day trial, the jury quickly acquitted Dixon-Jones, but when she sued the Eagle for libel, that jury sided with the newspaper, effectively ending her career. Morantz-Sanchez (History/Univ. of Michigan) has excavated the buried details of these trials. She meticulously delineates the background and circumstances: the sociology of Brooklyn, the cruel evolution of surgery on women, the education of female surgeons, the politics of gender in the medical profession, and the growth of investigative journalism. Along the way, she provides some stunning items, including an account of shocking surgical experiments performed without anesthesia in the late 1840s by J. Marion Sims on "volunteer" African-American slave women who suffered from vaginal fistulas. Much of the power of this story dissipates, however, because of Morantz-Sanchez's congested prose, which employs stodgy academic locutions and fashions paragraphs thick with quotations. Her devitalized prose limits the audience for this work, and her narrative structure also seems designed to dissuade rather than engage: between the brief introduction and the discussion of the trials stand more than 100 dense pages of "context" nearly half the book. More costly than compelling. -- Copyright 1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.