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AWE Editors

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A Woman's Experience

Brigham Young University's Journal for Women's Studies

Volume II

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"When a woman tells the truth she is creating the possibility for more truth around her."

Adrienne Rich

"To the Lighthouse"
—To the Lighthouse, Virginia Woolf

Alexandra Crafton

To our readers

AWE: A Woman's Experience, is a student-created journal dedicated to the expression of women's intellect and creativity and to the conviction that critical and artistic approaches to knowledge are as complementary as seeking learning by study and faith. This periodical strives to explore women's contributions to all fields of learning. Thus, contributions from all fields of study are invited. AWE intends to publish articles that openly address issues of relevance to women that conform to scholarly standards. AWE also invites poetry, personal essays, art and photography dealing with subjects relevant to women. Short studies, notes, and letters to the editor are also welcomed.

The opinions expressed in AWE are the opinions of the contributors. Their views should not necessarily be attributed to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Brigham Young University, or AWE faculty mentors, editors or staff.

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Contents

Journal Notes

Editors' Note i
Lisa Hansen

Ornaments v. Instruments iii
Natalie K. Soper

Contributors 85

Articles

Reflections on Making Women's Histories Beyond National Perspectives 1
Pamela S. Nadell, American University

"We Know How to Keep House and We Know How to Keep a City": Contextualizing Dr. Martha Hughes Cannon's Feminism 11
Jennifer L. Duqué

Inefficiency of United States Maternity Leave Policies 23
Kimberly Merkley

Dispossessing Femininity in Byatt's *Possession* 33
Jenna Miller

Women's Values Speaking Between Their Words: Women's Correspondence in Early Nineteenth Century America. 55
Rachel Mahrt Degn

Women in Refrigerators:
The Objectification of Women in Comics 73
Kyra Nelson

Personal Essays

Grace 45
Danielle Chelom Leavitt

Hands and Feet. 65
Jessie Hawkes Wilkey

Poetry

Seventeen. 21
Katie Wade-Neser

Infertile. 43
Katie Wade-Neser

Photography

Alexandra Crafton
"I have measured out my life with coffee spoons."
—"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," T.S. Elliot. 10

"The Mirror is dangerous. It sometimes
shows her the dark."—The Hours,
Michael Cunningham. 20

Brian Hoffman
Woman Sitting in Chair 32

Mother and Child. 42

Two Women Working at Quarry. 54

Woman Selling Plantain Chips. 64

Woman Working at Quarry. 72

Civil Marriage. 83

Editors' Note

Natalie Soper created the cover for this second issue of *AWE, A Woman's Experience*, to illustrate the theme "Ornaments or Instruments." Alexandra Crafton's lush black and white photography echoes this theme as she draws in ideas from Virginia Woolf. Brian Hoffman's bright photos of women in Ghana, West Africa underscore women as instrumental to the thriving of their communities.

Shannon and I were delighted to be able to include in this issue Pamela S. Nadell's article, "Reflections on *Making Women's Histories Beyond National Perspectives.*" Nadell, professor and Patrick Clendenen Chair of Women's and Gender History, and Chair of the History Department and American University, gave a keynote address at the 2013 BYU Women's Studies Conference which reviewed her experiences collecting and publishing the history of Jewish women.

Additional exploration of women's history through reviewing 19th century personal letters is found in Rachel Mahrt Degn's "Correspondence," and Mormon women's history is represented by Jennifer Duqué's treatment of Martha Hughes Cannon. Perspectives on United States maternity leave policies by Kimmie Merkley, and the portrayal of women in comics by Kyra Nelson contribute urgent social warnings while Jenna Miller's review of A.S. Byatt's *Possession* offers readers an opportunity to re-examine assumptions about femininity.

Poetry by Katie Wade-Neser and personal essays by Danielle Leavitt and Jessie Hawkes Wilkey add strong voices of women's lived experience.

We want to thank everyone who invested in this journal, including the Women's Studies Program at BYU, the *AWE* editorial staff and the authors, poets, artists and photographers who contributed their work to this issue. And we thank all of you, our readers! As a result of the investments of all aforementioned people, we are pleased to offer you this rich and diverse collection of beautiful works that demonstrate women speaking their truths. We hope you enjoy this journal as much as we do.

Lisa Tensmeyer Hansen
Shannon Soper

Artistic Director's Note: "Ornaments v. Instruments"

Natalie K. Soper

A drum is created to produce beautiful music. A Christmas ornament is created to be a beautiful addition to its surroundings. Although both of these are beautiful, they can be fundamentally different. Instruments are active, and ornaments are often inactive.

It is no secret that women are often objectified and sometimes participate in objectifying themselves. When women act primarily as ornaments, they can inadvertently limit their possibilities as instruments. However, both roles can enrich life; ornamentation is only a liability when it is the *end* of the story.

There is much truth in our ability to create goodness and beauty, and whether we conceptualize that as instrumentation or ornamentation, we can find meaning in those contributions. If we focus on what role the violin plays in the symphony, there is no need to argue whether or not it holds worth.

As women (and men, for that matter) we have an inherent duty to do, think, and be a force for good. Whether you're the cowbell being played softly by the fellow in the shadows, or the trombone driving the front row audience nuts—we need each other to make music worth listening to.

Reflections on Making Women's Histories Beyond National Perspectives

Pamela S. Nadell, PhD, American University

Before Brigham Young University's Third Annual Women's Studies Conference, I went back and re-read the introductions I wrote for two of my edited books: *American Jewish Women's History* (New York University Press, 2003) and *Making Women's Histories: Beyond National Perspectives* (co-edited with Kate Haulman, New York University Press, 2013). These books were published a decade apart. To my chagrin, I realized that I should have re-read the introduction to *American Jewish Women's History* before writing the one for *Making Women's Histories*. Only after I re-read my opening remarks side by side did I discover that I had inserted the very same quotation by Gerda Lerner into the opening paragraph of both books. In Lerner's autobiographical essay in *Voices of Women Historians: The Personal, the Political, the Professional*, she reflected: "My commitment to women's history came out of my life, not out of my head."[1] I keep turning to this particular quotation and turning it over because it holds the key to my own making of women's histories. In fact, I suspect that Lerner's words speak not only to me but also to many who are deeply engaged in the writing and teaching of women's and gender studies.

For this conference, with its theme of *Women, Race, and Ethnicity*, I placed these two books as my bookends for my personal project of making women's histories. In *American Jewish Women's History* I assembled some of the best essays and book chapters, written up to that time, on Jewish women. They explore Jewish women as daughters, wives, and mothers; students and teachers; workers and entrepreneurs. The chapters in this book convey the remarkable energy and diversity of Jewish women across 350 years of the American Jewish experience as well as the state of scholarship in this field in 2003.

In my other bookend, *Making Women's Histories: Beyond National Perspectives*, Kate Haulman and I gathered new essays. When read together, they demonstrate that

those writing women's histories hoped their works would advance women's status at their moments in time and into the future.

If I think of the writing of histories as a series of circles, some of which overlap, others of which are concentric, American Jewish women's history is a tiny circle circumscribed within the great circles of American history, U.S. women's history, American Jewish history, and world Jewish history. In American history, it lies contiguous to circles of African-American women's history (much larger), Latina history (also larger), and Irish-American women's history (likely smaller). By contrast, *Making Women's Histories* sits in a vast circle. Parts of it intersect with large national narratives like those of China, Egypt, India, and Russia. But beyond that, the book finds a place within the growing and potentially outsized circle of transnational history.

How did I come to the making of *American Jewish Women's History?* As is well known, before the 1970s, readers of history "encountered a world of 'significant knowledge,' in which women seemed not to exist."[2] In the next decade, as many began writing and teaching women's history—really histories, although this was not then widely acknowledged— some began asking, "Why was the history of the Jewish woman yet to be written?"[3] In fact, earlier in the twentieth century, a few women had written such histories. These pioneers—females, of course—dared to assert, in a less hospitable climate, that America's Jewish women had a history of their own. But these scholars were dismissed, ignored, or trivialized by male professors who then, from their prestigious positions in rabbinical seminaries and occasionally in the American academy, were the gatekeepers to the writing of Jewish history.[4]

Before the 1970s, readers of history "encountered a world of 'significant knowledge,' in which women seemed not to exist."

In the 1970s and 1980s, to the new, for want of a better word, mainstream women's historians just then claiming their places in this profession, Jewish women, did not seem a likely subject for study. That holds true, even though a surprising number of these scholars came from Jewish backgrounds.[5]

Even into the early 1990s, as the initial spurt of writing U.S. women's history gave way to the first syntheses of this scholarship, Jewish women remained subsumed under the category of white—and thus largely privileged—women. In the first edition of the widely taught *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, Jewish women were invisible. Multiculturalism did not then embrace this group. The reader included no article on American Jewish women, but two references to Jews anywhere in the text, and none to American Jewish women in the index. When Jewish women did surface in survey histories of American women, they appeared fleetingly, as immigrant girls striking for better wages in the garment industry or as the victims of the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire.[6]

By the end of the decade, however, historians of American women conceded the need for "a more complex approach to women's experiences." They came to recognize that "not all white women's histories can be categorized under one label." Some explicitly called "to diversify our coverage of Jewish American women."[7] As they did, they drew upon burgeoning scholarship that was capped, in 1997, by the celebrated publication of *Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, edited by the late Paula E. Hyman and Deborah Dash Moore. [I was privileged to be a member of its editorial advisory board.][8]

Encyclopedias usually synthesize existing scholarship. This one did not because so much of this scholarship had not yet been written. In over 1700 pages, and now available on the web as part of the encyclopedia of Jewish women around the world at the Jewish Women's Archive (www.jwa.org), this encyclopedia made history even as it was about the making of American Jewish women's history.

In articles about both individuals and broad topics, like Jewish women and assimilation and even an entry on Jewish female scholars of women's studies, this encyclopedia conveyed sweeping new knowledge about nearly 350 years of Jewish women's experiences in America. This encyclopedia and my reader *American Jewish Women's History*, which followed, showcased American Jewish women cooking in their kitchens and praying in the women's balconies of their synagogues. They scribbled at their writing tables and sold harnesses from behind the counters of their general stores. Some of them hunched over sewing machines until their aching fingers bled; others danced in front of the mirror. American Jewish women founded benevolent associations, orphanages, Sunday schools, and Zionist organizations. They joined together, sometimes just with Jewish women, sometimes also with Gentile women, to help others, especially women and children, at home and abroad. Jewish women embraced political crusades and wrote about their interior lives. They were stereotyped as overbearing, self-sacrificing Jewish mothers—How many Jewish mothers does it take to change a light bulb? "None, I'll sit in the dark"—and as spoiled, materialistic Jewish American princesses whose favorite words were "Charge it." Incidentally Jewish men created and popularized these stereotypes as anthropologist Riv-Ellen Prell explains in *Fighting to Become Americans*.[9] Jewish women also observed Sabbaths and holidays and eventually so dramatically reconfigured their places in Jewish religious life that, by the last quarter of the twentieth century, some had crashed the gender barrier to religious leadership and become rabbis.

This latter struggle is particularly pertinent to the topic of making women's histories, as I discovered in writing *Women Who Would Be Rabbis: A History of Women's Ordination, 1889-1985*. There I showed that the women who would have been rabbis, if women then could have been rabbis, brought forward women of the Jewish past, like the judge Deborah and the prophetess Huldah, to claim that, because Jewish tradition historically had women as religious leaders, nothing in that tradition prohibited modern Jewish women from becoming rabbis.[10]

At the core of *American Jewish Women's History* lies the question: What connects Abigaill Levy Franks, the great letter writer of colonial Jewry, who so bemoaned the aridity of her synagogue services that she heartily wished "a Calvin or a Luther would arise amongst us"[11] with the young Jewish women of the 1960s who headed South to work in the Civil Rights Movement?[12] *American Jewish Women's History* argues that they all lived lives at the intersections not only of their particular times and places, but also within their variegated and braided identities as women, as Jews, and as Americans. Perhaps the Jewish poet Muriel Rukeyser expressed this best when she penned: "To live as a poet, woman, American, and Jew—this chalks in my position."[13] So too, the American Jewish women we historians have chalked into history's spaces did so as historical actors living out their lives as women, as Americans, and as Jews.

However, with the publication of *Making Women's Histories*, I purposefully left America's Jewish women behind, at least for the moment. I came to conceive of *Making Women's Histories* during the 2008 conference "'With Vision Flying': New Perspectives on Women's and Gender History," which I organized at American University.[14] That conference featured new women's and gender historical scholarship primarily by AU faculty and alumni. Over the course of a day and a half, a striking thematic unity came to the fore. Presentation after presentation, unexpectedly, at least to me, demonstrated that parallel circumstances had sparked the writing of women's and gender history in different times and places.

I found [women] turning [to] women of the past to support their ambitions to expand their roles in their present.

Earlier I had found the women who would have been rabbis repeatedly turning, in their essays, speeches, and even rabbinical theses, to Jewish women of the past to support their ambitions to expand their roles in their present. During "'With Vision Flying'," I heard about others employing women's histories to advance women's status at other places and moments in time. It became evident that around the world, women and men had long used the project of the making of the women's histories as one of the keys to advancing women in society.

Making Women's Histories: Beyond National Perspectives was the result. In ten chapters (not conference papers, but rather new work especially commissioned for this volume), scholars stand atop various historiographic vantage points—Tsarist Russia, the British empire in Egypt and India, Qing-dynasty China, the U.S. roiling through the 1960s. From these and other peaks they gaze out at the world around them reflecting upon the historical circumstances that gave rise to the writing of women's histories in recent and distant pasts. *Making Women's Histories*' authors convey their personal discoveries of women's history and the accomplishments of women's and gender history within their specific fields. They examine the multiple turns the field has taken from women's history to gender history, from

gender history to cultural studies, from cultural studies to transnational history.[15] They consider spin-offs into intersecting fields, like the study of sexualities and of masculinities. They know that place and location do matter, that they determine the questions historians ask and answer. Some authors discovered precursors to the contemporary professionalized field of women's history; others imagine new directions the field will take in the years ahead.

Making Women's Histories also joins the large circle of conversation currently underway in the historical profession about globalizing historiography. As historians have grown increasingly critical of the limitations of the nation and have called upon scholars to write history in transnational and intercultural global contexts, this book brings transnational historical themes to the fore. While the individual chapters of *Making Women's Histories* (with a few important exceptions, like those of Claire Robertson which ranges widely across the history of women in Africa and Jocelyn Olcott on feminist history) are not internally transnational, when read together, they generate striking comparisons and contrasts.

So what does *Making Women's Histories* argue? First, no matter where, no matter when, whether in the twenty-first century or in the eighteenth, writing women's history was a political and politicized project. This historiography—whether written by professional historians or, as so often before the 1970s, by civil servants and politically-engaged women and men—was meant to help propel women forward in their societies.

Making Women's Histories opens by reminding us that 1960s feminism engendered an historical consciousness that led to the birth of an entire academic field of inquiry, one that then seemed utterly new. As Barbara Engel, a pioneer in Russian women's history, reflects: "women's history seemed part of a movement that might transform the world we knew."[16] Engel, Robertson, and Kathy Peiss, an historian of American women, confess that their scholarship came out of their personal encounters with the political. As Peiss writes: "This was heritage that supported and legitimized a social movement."[17] Their research and writing represented their personal contributions to the making of second-wave feminism.

That second-wave feminism pushed women out of the shadows and into history's spotlight, just as it was propelling women forward in so many other spheres, should not be surprising. But what was unanticipated is that there were similar phenomena in earlier eras. For example, in *Making Women's Histories* Arianne Chernock reports on eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries histories of British "women worthies"— that is studies of female queens, warriors, saints, and even villains, whose lives were so exceptional, that, despite being women, they left their imprint on the past.[18]

These books too became key sites for advancing debates over women's rights. When these old histories pointed, for example, to Mary Sydney, the Countess of Pembroke until her death in 1621, and her mastery of the Hebrew language, they

provided evidence for contemporaneous discussions over women's capacity to learn, to do, and to exercise civic and political rights. These histories put forward these exceptional women as role models capable of removing from society "that vulgar prejudice of the supposed incapacity of the female sex."[19] Chernock concludes that those writing great women into the past in earlier eras and the late-twentieth-century professional historians of women and gender equally knew that "to have the courage to act in the present, women needed to know that they were not alone in history."[20]

Even as women's and gender history engages the past, informs the present, and enters into the future, this scholarship is also enmeshed within a tangle of transnational debates over the meanings and uses of modernity, colonialism and anti-colonialism, the nation and nationalism.

For example, if the nation was to become modern, its women had to live modern lives, and producing women's histories was harnessed to this project. Modernity demanded change—education for girls and women everywhere, cleanliness and order in colonized households, new forms of medical care. Modernity also meant repudiating female traditions deemed anathema to Enlightenment ideals of rationality—footbinding in China, *sati* (the self-immolation of a widow on her husband's funeral pyre) in India, the harem in Egypt. Both colonialists and nationalists critiqued these behaviors for yoking women to the past and hence limiting the nation, preventing it from taking its proper place in the modern world order. For colonizers, the necessity of such reforms justified their imperial "gendered civilizing mission."[21] But anti-colonialists thought they should be the ones to emancipate their nation's women. If they, rather than the colonials or the imperial state would take charge of "liberating" women, they could advance their ultimate aim of freeing the nation. Both sides used an emerging literature on women's history for their explicitly political purposes.

The development of women's history and its historiographies—the books and articles historians, whether scholars or amateurs, have produced—has long contributed to the work of advancing the status of women in society.

Given my making of *Women Who Would Be Rabbis*, I should not have been surprised by the deeply political and politicized nature of making women's histories. As noted already, every single one of the pioneers I unearthed for that book and so many of those advocating for women's ordination in Judaism's century-long debate had used the history of Jewish women in the past. Like those elsewhere who had pointed to the Countess of Pembroke, these advocating for women's rabbinic ordination brought forth a parade of Jewish women from biblical times onward. Champions of women rabbis insisted that these historical figures, with

their learning, knowledge, and leadership, substantiated that Jewish tradition, even if it had never before called a woman rabbi, had indeed permitted women to take on rabbinical roles. This history justified the claims of the women who would have been rabbis. It promised that, if they became rabbis, they would uphold the traditions of the Jewish past, not overthrow them.

Making Women's Histories also affirms the political nature of writing women's histories. The development of women's history and its historiographies—the books and articles historians, whether scholars or amateurs, have produced—has long contributed to the work of advancing the status of women in society. It is this political project that bridges my two bookends. One is about a particular small ethnic/religious group, the other about writing women's histories broadly across time and space. Yet, in the end, these bookends, like the enormous circle of historiography in women's and gender history, sustain the truism that all history is politics. After all, we historians know that "remembering is not," and never has been, "a neutral act."[22]

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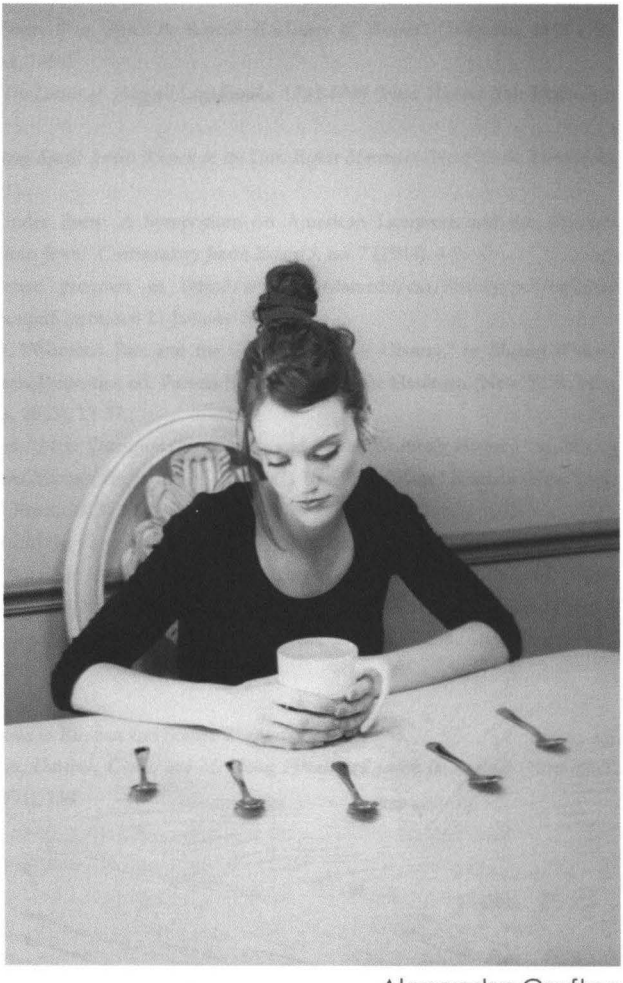
"I have measured out my life
with coffee spoons."
— *"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," T.S. Elliot*



Alexandra Crafton

"We Know How to Keep House and We Know How to Keep a City":
Contextualizing Dr. Martha Hughes Cannon's Feminism

Jennifer L. Duqué

"I can't bear a mannish woman or a mannish man either," Martha Hughes Cannon declared a few days after she was elected the first female state senator in the United States. "All the best men I know are ladylike and all the best women I know are gentlemanly" (qtd. in Black). Running on a Democratic platform, she'd just beaten her own husband, the Republican Angus Cannon. The Mormon enclave of Utah territory was one of long-avowed seclusion from the outside world, and yet it wasn't immune from transitioning dialogues regarding "the woman question." Even at a young age, Martha (Mattie) Cannon attested to that. In the late 1870s, while avant-garde women in high society were adopting typically masculine performances like attending universities and participating in politics, Mattie Cannon chopped her hair short and walked six miles every day in men's boots in order to go to her typesetting job and university classes (McCrimmon 2). As shocking as it might have been for some nineteenth-century Salt Lake City inhabitants to see the bobbed Cannon tromping through the city, skirt hitched up to reveal masculine footwear, it might be equally shocking for the present-day reader to learn that Cannon's ambitions were not without the precedent of, nor encouragement from, both male and female leaders of her Mormon polygamist community.

Cannon's ambitions were not without the precedent of, nor encouragement from, both male and female leaders of her Mormon polygamist community.

Throughout her life, Cannon pulled seemingly subversive stunts framed within a milieu of social support that demystifies, or at least partially elucidates, her frequent departure from normative female behavior. However, the purpose of this paper is not to join the voices of scholars arguing that nineteenth-century Mormon culture

was one of radical egalitarianism. As Catherine Brekus notes in "Mormon Women and the Problem of Historical Agency," Mormon scholars sometimes react to charges of a sexist, patriarchal past (and present) with overly effusive depictions of early Mormon women as independent proto-feminists. For instance, in "Plural Wives," Stephanie Smith Goodson argues that polygamy provided a matriarchal family structure in which women presided together in sisterhood; similarly, Joan S. Iversen's "Feminist Implications of Mormon Polygyny" emphasizes what she sees as the "intense female bonding" and female autonomy inherent within this marriage structure, an idea which Terryl Givens in *The Latter-day Saint Experience in America* also chooses to highlight (qtd. in Brekus 73–74). Rather, I argue that Cannon's personal understandings and explorations of gender performance must be contextualized in an environment in which negotiations between the customary and the progressive were conventionalized, coded as acceptable at the leadership level, and emulated as such at the congregational and individual level.

The germ of this discussion is indebted to Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. In her essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," Butler argues that "gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo," meaning that gender is constructed by a historically situated "script" reified by social circumstance (520). However, just as different actors perform the same script differently, gender is still interpretable by individuals. "Gender is an act which has been rehearsed," Butler writes, "much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again" (526).[1] With this framework in mind, this paper will examine Cannon's public roles as doctor, suffragist, and politician within a contextualizing narrative, and also discuss the ways in which she interacted with this script.

Martha Hughes Cannon was born in Llandudno, Wales in 1857 to Peter Hughes and Elizabeth Evans Hughes, both converts to the burgeoning Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In 1860, the Hughes family left Wales to join the Saints in "Zion." On the trail West, Cannon's father and younger sister died of an illness that would have been treatable had the proper medicine been on hand, the memory of which affected young Cannon deeply (Graña 7). In 1861, her mother married James Patten Paul, a widower, with whom she had five more children. At an early age, Cannon worked alongside her siblings to help provide for the large family, becoming a schoolteacher at age fourteen. She despised the work, however, and soon afterwards at the recommendation of Brigham Young, she was apprenticed to the manager of the *Deseret News* print shop (Graña 11). Here, Cannon learned to set type, a skill that later secured her employment for the *Woman's Exponent*, the Church's publication for women. It was while she was

1 Of course, Butler's theory of performativity cannot be reduced to scripts, or even to "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution." See Butler's Gender Trouble for her later, and more thorough, discussion about gender performativity.

working for the *Exponent* that she learned that the University of Michigan had begun accepting women to its medical school (Graña 11).

Cannon's community encouraged her to go to medical school because of—and not despite—her gender. Prior to that encouragement, however, significant rhetorical transitions took place at the leadership level regarding doctors and medicine without which, validation from leaders and community would have been unlikely. Brigham Young had remarked in 1869, "Doctors and their medicines I regard as a deadly bane to any community . . . I am not very partial to doctors . . . I can see no use for them unless it is to raise grain or go to mechanical work" (qtd. in Wilcox 26). He preferred the more traditional Thomsonian method of healing to orthodox medicine, as demonstrated when he urged in 1852:

> When you are sick, call for the Elders, who will pray for you, anointing with oil and the laying on of hands; and nurse each other with herbs, and mild food, and if you do these things, in faith, and quit taking poisons, and poisonous medicines, which God never ordained for the use of men, you shall be blessed. (qtd. in Wilcox 28)

Brother Brigham's change of heart was largely a response to the Saints' increased exposure to "Gentiles," who came along with the transcontinental railroad and the booming Utah mining industry (Crall 9). Cultivating Mormon doctors would keep Mormons self-sufficient in the face of Gentile hospitals and doctors. In 1872, Brigham began calling men to study medicine in Eastern schools, and a year later the "Matriarch of Mormonism" Eliza R. Snow, then General Relief Society president, urged him to call women to receive equal training (Graña 11). In 1873, Brigham Young declared, "The time has come for women to come forth as doctors in these valleys of the mountains," which definitively endorsed Snow's counsel (qtd. in Crall 10). She in turn announced in the 1873 Relief Society conference, with certain satisfaction, one imagines, that "President Young is requiring the sisters to get students of Medicine. If they cannot meet their own expenses, we have means of doing so" (qtd. in Derr et al. 106).

As noted previously, Butler's theory of gender performativity operates under Merleau-Ponty and de Beauvoir's understanding of gender to be "an historical idea" or "situation" rather than "natural fact" (520). On this token, Cannon was situated in a place and time that had reified a concept of femaleness congruent with higher education, particularly in the medical field. Romania B. Pratt, Ellis R. Shipp, and Maggie Shipp were Mormon women "called" by Young to study medicine before Cannon knew about the Michigan opportunity, and the ambitions of the younger doctor-to-be had inherited a certain degree of normalization from the previous generation's steps forward. To further contextualize historically, the Victorian notion of "separate spheres," often used to bar women from engaging in public activity was interpreted to almost mandate female doctors for the sake of propriety. As Linda Wilcox notes, "The motivation behind this movement

came not so much from a desire to promote equal opportunity for women as from a desire to head off the influence of Gentile doctors and especially to keep obstetrical care as a female province" (33). With a hint of warning, Eliza R. Snow stated at a meeting of the Cooperative of General Retrenchment Association in 1873 that, "We want sister physicians that can officiate in any capacity that the gentlemen are called upon to officiate and unless they educate themselves the gentlemen that are flocking in our midst will do it" (qtd. in Crall 10–11). Female Mormon doctors would both keep Gentile practice at bay and pacify Victorian fears of immodesty; consequently, as Wilcox further notes, "Mormon women . . . were doubly qualified by gender and by religion for this work" (33). Hence, the "historical idea" within which Cannon was situated made it conceivable for her to pursue a medical career without deviating from the normative gendered script.

Cannon continued to cross into and redefine traditionally male-dominated spheres when she entered the world of politics—first as a suffragist and later as a state senator. As in her medical school education, however, she was far from being a lone trailblazer. Years before she was politically active, the "great indignation meeting" of 1870 had established Mormon women as political actors, fully capable of functioning in the public sphere (Wagenen 66). The purpose of this meeting was to protest the Cullom Act, an anti-polygamy bill recently introduced in Congress, as well as to demand their revoked suffrage. Their spirited articulateness challenged the nation's construct of Mormon women as slavish dupes and made room in the Mormon identity for politicized women. For these early Mormon feminists, fighting for women's rights was inextricable from fighting against anti-polygamy legislation; hence, the suffrage movement in Utah simultaneously expanded Mormon female identity while upholding traditional Mormonism. The Utah Woman Suffrage Song Book is a microcosmic case of this phenomenon: to the tune of the chorus of "Hope of Israel," for example, suffragists sang:

Cannon continued to cross into and redefine traditionally male-dominated spheres.

> Woman, 'rise! thy penance o'er,
> Sit thou in the dust no more;
> Seize the scepter, hold the fan,
> Equal with thy brother, man
> (qtd. in Derr et al. 147)

Hence, Mormon women, Cannon included, used their Mormon lexicon to form their discourses on gender equality, whether in demonstrations, speeches, or rewritten hymns.

Suffrage was still an important issue when Cannon returned to Utah after a self-imposed exile. (During the years of enforced anti-polygamy legislature, Cannon and her small daughter went "underground" in order to avoid incriminating

Angus, her polygynous husband, and avoid being called to court to testify against her patients. For more information on this chapter of Cannon's life, see Lieber and Sillito's *Letters from Exile: The Correspondence of Martha Hughes Cannon and Angus M. Cannon, 1886–1888.*) Having earned multiple degrees, including a degree in oratory, she became an intelligent and vital voice in Utah's and the nation's suffragist movement. An 1894 speech published in the *Exponent* shows that she saw gender as a historically situated script, but also as mutable. "Once to be born a female was to become a plaything or a slave," she declared, "today in the best most cultivated, and most powerful circles woman is the peer of the noblest man" (Cannon 115). Still operating to an extent within a gender essentialist and separate spheres ideology, she argues, "the difference in the natures of men and women, is not a difference in value, but the kind of merit. He has qualities which she has not; she possesses traits and genius that he has not, they differ from each other, and to God they are equal with each other" (115). Female liberation doesn't entail individual masculinization, she insinuates, but rather a feminized cultural script. "In these modern times the standards of value have been readjusted," she then states, going on to compare "masculine" and "feminine" traits: "whereas once physical strength and reckless courage were held in the highest and almost exclusive esteem of mankind—now the gems of wisdom, culture, purity, beauty, love, and skill have a value which may outweigh and purchase that brute force once so priceless" (115). Interestingly, the following poem published in the *Exponent* later in the year exhibits similar language in support of cultural reform:

> We but ask for freedom and the right to live and be
> What we are designed in God's great plan;
> And we're sure all thinking men will very shortly see
> Women must have equal rights with man [. . .]
> We must pay our taxes, and the laws we must obey.
> And it's time an era now began
> When in the elections we can also have a say –
> Woman should have equal rights with man
> (qtd. in Crall 62)

This poem exhibits the scripts Cannon and Mormon suffragists interpreted to further their cause. The plea for an era of egalitarianism is tellingly framed within a religious plea to "be / What we are designed in God's great plan." Well aware of the cultural scripts they inherited, Cannon and the author of this poem believe that God's plan includes equality—i.e., women should no longer be treated as slaves and should have political voice. However, it is worth noting that Cannon's vision of a feminized culture and the phrase "what we are designed in God's great plan" nevertheless appeal to the Victorian notion of gender essentialism, a "deeply entrenched or sedimented [expectation] of gendered existence" (Butler 524). Her understanding of gender, then, is an interpretation of the social forces that constitute her as a gendered subject.

Politics is generally considered a masculine sphere, but Cannon lived up to her own principle of "feminizing" the culture/script rather than "masculinizing" herself in order to fit in. After she was elected State Senator in 1896, she said to a reporter for the *San Francisco Examiner*, "I shall take great interest in all the sanitary bills, of course, and all bills pertaining to educational matters" (qtd. in Black). This was consistent with the traditional script of women performing as nurturers, and the oft-cited perception of women in the "public sphere" operating as "social housekeepers." Cannon was well aware of this. "Women are good ones for those things," she said, "We know how to keep house and we know how to keep a city" (qtd. in Black). True to her word, the bills she introduced as senator related to public health and education, all of which became laws. She helped create and became a member of the State Board of Health, which significantly improved municipal sanitation. While the Board's attempts to require smallpox vaccination and improve livestock sanitation were unsuccessful, it eradicated unsanitary drinking fountains and improved Salt Lake's sewage system, thus lowering high infant mortality rates and the spread of typhoid (Edwards 5, Graña 96–97). She passed an act to provide for the compulsory education of deaf, mute, and blind children, and built a hospital for this explicit use (Graña 90). Her act to protect the health of women and children employees required the seemingly obvious amenity of chairs for women to rest in while they were not working. She helped defeat a lobby intending to dissolve the State Board of Public Examiners, which certified doctors and midwives and "prevent[ed] incompetents from practicing medicine" (Wells 48). In sum, Cannon adhered to her own advice that, "To secure just laws and then execution [*sic*] will require the exercise of much common sense and at this point woman's foresight and quick judgment would be an aid in the construction of good government" (Cannon 114).

Cannon lived up to her own principle of "feminizing" the culture/script rather than "masculinizing" herself in order to fit in.

While cultural context is key to understanding gender performance, Butler notes that "the body is not passively scripted with cultural codes, as if it were a lifeless recipient of wholly pre-given cultural relations" (Butler 526). Rather, just as scripts can be individually interpreted and enacted, "so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives" (526). While pointing out the historical events that influenced Cannon's construct of appropriate female behavior, her agency cannot be disregarded. At times, in fact, her opinions were frankly discordant with mainstream Church discourse. In an 1896 interview with a reporter from the *San Francisco Examiner*, for instance, she states, "Motherhood is a great thing, a glorious thing, and it ought to be a successful thing. It will be when it is regulated. Some day there will be a law compelling people to have no more than a certain number of children and the mothers of the land can live as they ought to live" (Black 5). To an earlier Mormon worldview, the idea that a woman living or performing as

she ought to live could entail birth control would have been antithetical. Indeed, one of the main points of polygamy was to provide physical accommodations for spirits needing to come to earth. As Orson Pratt expounded at length in his 1852 talk "Celestial Marriage," the object of marriage is to multiply the "species," and having plural wives enables maximum reproduction. In addition, the nation was in the throes of an anti-abortion crusade, and at the time contraception and infanticide were frequently characterized as indistinguishable (Bush 13). Mormons were similarly seized up in the national scare, as well as the national confusion, as John Taylor conveyed when he mourned in 1882, "already are licentiousness and debauchery corrupting, undermining and destroying society; already are we interfering with the laws of nature and stopping the functions of life, and have become the slayers of our own offspring" (62).

Even in this dissent, however, Cannon did not completely depart from the script; rather, she merely continued to interpret it. At one point in the *San Francisco Examiner* interview, she adds as if to validate a point, "Our great teacher, Brigham Young, understood all these" (qtd. in Black 5). By "all these," she signified gender equality: "He said, I heard him say it with these ears of mine, 'The day shall come when men and women shall walk together side by side in the temple.' That day is dawning now." Her very next comment, "Electricity will soon do away with much of the domestic drudgery," demonstrates that, in her mind, with equality in the temple would come gender equality in society. The following quote by Young further emphasizes the crucial point that Cannon's egalitarian version of "doing" gender was not without authoritative permission:

> We believe that women are useful, not only to sweep houses, wash dishes, make beds, and raise babies, but that they should stand behind the counter, study law or physic, or become good book-keepers and be able to do the business in any counting house, and all this to enlarge their sphere of usefulness for the benefit of society at large. In following these things they but answer the design of their creation. These, and many more things of equal utility are incorporated in our religion, and we believe in and try to practice them. (61)

Young's vision would be impossible, Cannon insinuates, if women were only subject to the "domestic drudgery" of "wash tubs and baby flannels" and "the worship of the holy stove" (Black 5). Thus, according to her interpretation of the script, Young's sanction for women to "enlarge their sphere of usefulness" resulted in Cannon's almost de facto reading in favor of women controlling their own fertility.

Oftentimes when scholars discuss nineteenth-century Mormon women, they tend to depict them either as presiding matriarchs or oppressed victims of patriarchy. The former rejects conventional gender roles, the latter epitomizes

them, and both are caricatures. Butler's theory of gender as performance offers a humanizing balance between the liberated feminist and the subordinate. Keeping in mind that historical subjects like Cannon, as extraordinary as they are, "enact[ed] interpretations within the confines of already existing directives" (Black 5) encourages us to examine those directives, giving us a glimpse into their *zeitgeist*. While Cannon was constrained by her gender in many ways—for instance, polygamy often left her feeling abandoned by her husband, and going underground forced her to stop practicing medicine—it would be a mistake to think that Cannon herself envisioned Mormon women as capable of anything less than presiding matriarchy. "Show me a nation," she said, "where the machinery of every household is conducted by an intelligent woman, who is its superintendent—Queen if you please—and not its drudge—assisted by the advice and counsel of the masculine element, and I will show you a nation that has well nigh reached the Zenith of its glory" (Cannon 114). True, her language of emancipation is domestic-bound, which might moderate its progressive message to twenty-first–century sensibilities, but it is nonetheless a stirringly, even daringly, emancipatory interpretation of her script.

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"The Mirror is dangerous. It sometimes shows her the dark."

—The Hours, Michael Cunningham

Alexandra Crafton

Seventeen

Katie Wade-Neser

my grandmother in Yugoslavia
in a crass heavy home where ten kids
all callow filthy
blue scrounge for a meal until there is money
to send one of them to America for marriage

and they pick my grandmother then before
she leaves there is sex
talk from a hoary haired mother saying
your whole self is loot until he is a man
you know and even then
you will never get all of you back

the boat to America is stoic
waiting and when she gets there
he is handsome but mostly
because he is American

that first night is a frigid sweat and no
kind of gentle surprise and his Catholic
voice saying whats done is done

after she waits until he is asleep and crawls
to the porch and someone's fingers drum the railing
and someone feels ice where she does not yet know children

oh grandmother you will never return
to find the one thing
you left waiting for you

even now you have forgotten
what it was

Inefficiency of United States Maternity Leave Policies

Kimberly Merkley

In the United States, many aspects of the workplace are incompatible with motherhood. These include lack of childcare facilities, inflexibility of workplace hours, and the large amounts of time required to attain top positions. One of the most widespread deficiencies in all industries and workplaces is maternity leave, which is neglected at both the state and federal level. Consequently, a woman is often given little or no job protection, let alone compensation or benefits, while focused on the birth and early nurturing of her child. The United States falls well behind other developed and developing countries in this area.

The term *maternity leave* is one of a number of different terms under the umbrella of parental leave. Parental leave also encompasses paternity, parental, adoptive, and family leave (Tanaka 7). Maternity leave is specifically used by mothers prior to and after the birth or adoption of a child, and indicates benefits or work protection for that period (Tanaka 7–8).

The United States' maternity policies fall behind equally advanced countries when it comes to length and benefits.

Numerous studies demonstrate that the United States' maternity policies fall behind equally advanced countries when it comes to length and benefits. The United States and Australia are the only developed economies in the world that provide no federally paid maternity leave (Brown). Yet even in Australia, women are still offered up to fifty-two weeks of unpaid leave with job protection, while US women are only offered twelve weeks under the Family and Medical Leave Act, the only nationwide policy covering maternity care. Countries with fully paid maternity leave policies include Serbia, Denmark, Sweden, and Bosnia, among others and countries with partially paid maternity leave include the United Kingdom, Japan, and Botswana. Countries with unpaid maternity leave policies include the United States, Somalia, Swaziland, and

Zambia (Brown). It hardly seems feasible that the United States, the wealthiest country in the world and one that dominates the political and military scene, is on par with smaller, underdeveloped countries with regards to maternity leave policy.

The United Kingdom provides an interesting comparison because of its shared history with the United States. Both countries adopted democratic governments in similar eras and have been allies for over a century. In the United Kingdom, paid maternity leave is considered a right. The government website describing maternity leave policy clearly states that an employer who does not comply is liable for sex discrimination charges (NI Direct). By law in the United Kingdom, it is a woman's right to have 90 percent of her weekly salary paid for the first six weeks of her leave, and then for the next thirty-three weeks she should be paid the lower of either the average weekly payment or 90 percent of her weekly salary (NI Direct). Even women who are not citizens but are employed in the country are eligible for these benefits. In summary, women can take leave up to thirty-nine weeks with the knowledge that their jobs are protected. Conversely, in the United States it is difficult for citizens to get any kind of paid maternity leave, and even when paid leave is offered, job protection is not guaranteed. Consequently, US mothers may be forced to choose between spending time with their new baby and keeping their job.

US mothers may be forced to choose between spending time with their new baby and keeping their job.

Sweden is considered a progressive country regarding gender parity. Ann Crittenden, in *The Price of Motherhood: Why the Most Important Job in the World is Still the Least Valued,* details maternal care among Sweden's employed women. She explains that women are awarded generous benefits surrounding the births of their children, including up to 480 days off with 80 percent of their salary and job protection. After Swedish women do return to work, they are given the option of working an 80 percent schedule until their children are out of preschool, allowing mothers to be more accessible to their children (Crittenden 247–48). Thus Swedish women are allowed to spend nearly four years with their new children, thanks to their country's generous maternal leave policy. This right extends to Swedish fathers as well, who are given the option of paid paternity leave with job protection for up to two months when there is a new child in the home.

The differences between policies in the United States and Sweden may stem from their differing philosophical backgrounds. As Martha Ozawa notes, there are philosophical differences between the way the US and Swedish governments see problems related to the family (Ozawa 301–302). Sweden's social policy assumes that "parents are individuals rather than...parts of an indivisible family unit" (Ozawa 301) while the United States has usually assumed that parents comprise a self-reliant unit that is responsible for managing both work and family. This

differs significantly from the United States' next-door neighbor, Canada, where recent rulings suggested that bearing children benefits the population as a whole. Courts in Canada decry "imposing all the costs of pregnancy on one half of the population" as inherently unequal (White 228). In the United States, however, there is still a perception that when individuals choose to have children, they must bear all the economic and opportunity costs of those children as well.

Scholars note other reasons why the United States lags so far behind other developed countries in maternity leave policy. Exceptionalism acknowledges that the United States naturally differs from other advanced countries and does not necessarily seek to follow their legal or social example (Levmore 209-10). For instance, the United States is less concerned about low fertility rates, which plague Sweden and other Nordic countries and result in workplace shortages. Countries with lower birthrates are incentivized to provide generous family leave in order to both encourage citizens to have children and also to return to the workplace. The United States is an exception among its developed neighbors in that it does not experience employee shortages or a disastrous birth rate (Levmore 209–10).

The federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) covers the minimum nationwide maternity leave offered in the United States. All states must abide by the act although they are also free to offer additional benefits. The act requires "some U.S. employers to offer maternity leave to women with qualifying employment histories" (Ruhm 175). Note that the law specifies that only "some" US employers are required by law to provide a measure of maternity leave to their female employees, and only those women with "qualifying employment histories" receive those benefits. FMLA was not passed until 1993, rather late in the twentieth century, and individual state legislatures had generally not acted prior to that time. The tumultuous history of the FMLA's passage is not surprising, given US economic and social attitudes toward maternity leave.

In the late 1960s, with the advent of the Civil Rights and feminist movements, many people favored establishing a federal law to provide maternity leave and more generous benefits for those raising families. In 1977, President Jimmy Carter began organizing the first White House Conference on Families. Prior to that national conference, community, state, and regional conferences encouraged discussion about family issues including childhood education, the supporting two-parent employment, and maternity leave. The White House Conference on Families was held in 1980 and was "so politically contentious that it stymied any federal development for almost a decade" (Borgenschein 1136), stalling family leave policies that had been a major concern of working mothers (Gilbert 628). In 1985, the first family leave bill was introduced in Congress, but hard lobbying was required before a later version of that bill was passed by Congress five years later, only to be vetoed by President George H. W. Bush. Finally, after twelve years of lobbying, both houses of Congress passed the Family and Medical Leave Act which was signed into law by President Bill Clinton (Monroe 46).

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is administered by the Wage and Labor Division of the Department of Labor. This act, as its name suggests, mandates more than maternity care. It allows for twelve workweeks of leave within twelve months in order for the individual to care for a family member or for one's own sickness (United States Department of Labor). This leave is unpaid, but job protected. Only companies employing more than 50 people are bound by this legislation. An employee must also have worked with the same company for at least a year and must have worked for at least 1,250 hours. The employer has to continue paying health insurance benefits, but is not required to pay any of the salary unless the employee happens to live in one of the three states where those payments are part of state law (Ruhm 176). There are some circumstances in which a person's sick leave or vacation days must also be used to count for the paid time off. No firm is required by federal law to offer any kind of paid leave (Averett 404). The FMLA was certainly a step forward for family leave policies, but it did not mandate enough benefits to mothers and fathers who are often forced to choose between the essentials of work life and family life.

The FMLA has been praised for its gender neutrality, as it does not discriminate between fathers or mothers for leave eligibility (White 230) and because it can be used for a family or personal illness. However, its lack of focus on maternity leave means that it is not generous enough for women who want to both keep their jobs and have enough time to bond with and nurture their newborns. In 1997, American pediatricians recommended that each baby be breastfed for a year after birth to ensure proper growth and nutrition (Crittenden 258). Yet this recommendation may be impossible for millions of working women when they are only allowed twelve weeks off from work without pay, at best. Mothers who realize the importance of breast-feeding their children also realize that it may be impossible to do so for a year and keep their jobs. Mothers are then forced to choose between their children's wellbeing and their ability to earn a living. Even though the passing of FMLA was a good first step for the United States, it does not provide enough compensation for the female laborers who cannot afford to take the twelve weeks of unpaid leave because of the economic consequences (Williams 237). Mothers often feel forced to go back to work early, cutting down on precious bonding and breast-feeding time with their newborns because staying home with no income is unsustainable for many women, married or not. The FMLA simply does not do enough for the majority of working women.

The FMLA does not even provide for almost half of the women who need maternity leave.

The FMLA does not even provide for almost half of the women who need maternity leave. As Christopher Ruhm discovered, only a maximum of around 55 percent of employed people are eligible for coverage under the FMLA. And the actual percentages of mothers who are able to use FMLA for maternity benefits are even lower. Only 63 percent of new mothers over the age of nineteen are

employed for one year before giving birth, and only 52 percent meet the FMLA tenure and hour requirements. In addition, only 59 percent work for a company employing more than fifty people. Because these groups overlap, it is estimated that only 19 percent of all new mothers (which includes those who stay at home and those in the workplace) are eligible for the (unpaid), job-protected maternity leave offered by FMLA (Ruhm 177). The FMLA is too limited in its scope if it can only assist 19 percent of the people who could appropriately benefit from it.

To evaluate the limited benefits of the FMLA, in 2005 the National Partnership for Women & Families compiled an in-depth report about the state of family leave policies in the United States. They evaluated each of the fifty states and gave each a grade based on the number of benefits the state gives under its leave policies, including parental leave. Points are awarded based on family leave benefits (twenty-five points), medical/maternity leave benefits (twenty points), flexible sick days (fifteen points), at-home infant care benefits (fifteen points), expanded job protection for family leave (twenty-five points), medical/maternity leave (twenty points), and state family leave laws (twenty points). The results reveal the dismal status of family leave policies in the United States. Thirty-two states received a grade of D+ or lower (Grant et al. 14–15). Although not all of these areas directly apply to maternity leave, the depressing quantity of failed grades demonstrates that overall, family leave policies within the United States are deficient. In the United States, maternity leave is considered a luxury rather than a right for working mothers.

US employers bemoan the high cost of generous leave, claiming tight budgets and diminishing profits. Yet evidence from US states that have implemented parental leave policies suggest ways to offer working men and women some kind of partially paid leave without employers bearing the entire cost. California, New Jersey, and Washington currently offer paid leave programs (Brown). A mother on maternity leave gets paid up to 55 percent of her salary for the weeks or months that she is off work to care for her newborn. In addition to the nationwide Family and Medical Leave Act there is the California Paid Family Leave, which is paid leave but without job protection. There is also the California Pregnancy Disabled Leave, which is paid, and the California Family Rights Act, which is unpaid but job-protected (State of California). The State Disability Insurance Program offers up to six weeks off of work for care of a family member. California's system functions so that this parental leave is paid by all employers, in a similar fashion to disability pay, and costs employees less than $2.25 per month (Grant et al. 9). Lucky parents can cobble together all these options and come out with perhaps five or six months paid leave, depending on if they want to cash in sick days. Unfortunately, even Californians have less maternity leave and job security than non-citizens in other wealthy developed countries.

Systems in New Jersey and Washington are similar to California's. In New Jersey, a flat rate amount of 0.09 percent is deducted from each employee's paycheck. When employees wish to go on medical or parental leave, they are eligible to

receive up to two-thirds of their weekly salary for six weeks. Washington's policy is structured so that a parent receives up to $250 per week for five weeks. As in California, this pay is considered disability pay (Brown). It should still be noted that mothers who work on a freelance basis or are employed with companies who employ fewer than fifty employees do not benefit. This qualification means that around 40 to 45 percent of workers are ineligible for coverage under the FMLA (Berger 333). Also, a woman must work a minimum number of hours for a specific company in order to qualify for benefits. For a country so economically strong as the United States, it seems incongruous to be so far behind other countries with respect to protecting the rights of parents who are raising the next generation of citizens.

Paid leave is often beneficial to businesses as it ensures employee loyalty and encourages working mothers to return to their positions. As pointed out earlier, a small amount can be deducted from each employee paycheck to be used for maternity leave, and that amount is minimal enough to cause negligible strain on any company or employee. Studies from companies abroad show that paid leave for parents helps keep parents working at that company because they know that they have a job to return to after taking their leave. "Wage replacement, not simply having time off work, increases the likelihood that women will work later into their pregnancies and return to work faster" (Grant et al. 10). In the long run, if it does not cost much per paycheck to implement a paid leave system, it will be beneficial to companies to provide paid parental leave, which helps employers retain trained employees.

Paid leave is often beneficial to businesses as it ensures employee loyalty and encourages working mothers to return to their positions.

In addition to being beneficial to business, paid maternity leave is what most American mothers want. The National Partnership for Women and Children conducted a survey regarding Americans' opinions on parental leave. The study suggests that although 81 percent of working women think it is important to have paid leave for care of family members, only 43 percent have access to that kind of leave. Another telling fact is that 82 percent of employees ages eighteen to thirty-four—ages at which people are likely to have children—wish to see FMLA expanded to mandate paid leave (Grant et al. 10). If 82 percent of people prefer paid leave so that they can be both good parents and good workers, workplaces in the United States should seriously consider their preference. The FMLA should be expanded, possibly using a system similar to California's or New Jersey's where the financial burden is spread out over the state's employees. Such a plan is not too burdensome even in times of economic downturn and would encourage employee loyalty, support parents and children, and increase productivity.

Reasons why the United States still does not have a comprehensive maternity leave policy are nuanced. American sensibilities may resist rewarding workers who put their family before jobs, even temporarily. American "exceptionalism" may also impede the process. It is also possible that the United States has a tradition that the workplace is entirely separate from the family sphere. When one works, one is expected to be an ideal worker, giving full time and overtime commitment. Employees who take time off for childbearing or childrearing are punished through being denied access to the best of what the workplace has to offer (Williams 1). Yet we do not have to be constrained by our tradition. We can form a new tradition in which we celebrate families and parents by making the workplace more flexible and offering more generous paid parental leave. The US government should consider expanding the FMLA to meet the needs of working parents and catch up with the dozens of other developed countries that have already realized the benefits of providing for the parents of the next generation of laborers.

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Woman Sitting in Chair

This Ghanaian woman owns a fried rice stand where she cooks and sells every evening.

Brian Hoffman

Dispossessing Femininity in Byatt's *Possession*

Jenna Miller

A.S. Byatt's best-selling 1990 novel *Possession* follows the character of Roland Michell, an intelligent but struggling academic who has devoted his life and studies to the brilliant Victorian author, Randolph Ash. Roland joins forces with Maud Bailey, an expert on a similarly talented but under-recognized Victorian author Christabel LaMotte,[1] in order to better study the relationships between LaMotte, Ash, and Ash's wife, Ellen. Roland's and Maud's literary studies develop along with their relationship, but the more the two of them learn about the relationship between Ash and Christabel, the more they discover that the truth about their Victorian counterparts is both more complex and immediate than they had expected.

Because of its complicated structure and multi-layered themes, *Possession* has been read by critics as a feminist text in a number of ways. Jane Campbell points out that *Possession* invites a feminist reading because "Byatt both uses and subverts romance; she uses the genre to suggest ways of transcending the assumptions of patriarchy....The novel looks at right and wrong ways to possess in personal relationships" (108). As Roland and Maud increase their collaboration to discover the truth about their Victorian counterparts, authors Ash and Christabel, they become romantically involved, each ultimately retaining both independence and creative autonomy. Some critics have highlighted Byatt's simultaneous twisting and questioning preconceptions about femininity in the Victorian period and modern times by juxtaposing the sexual frankness of Victorian writer Christabel with the "beauty and...unapproachable frigidity" of Maud, the primary modern female character (Hart 207). Many have also focused on how *Possession* validates female homosexuality by "resuscitating lesbian visibility," contending that *Possession* authenticates homosexuality as a viable way of life for both modern and Victorian

1 Editor's note: The reader may note that some characters in this paper are referenced by first names and others by last names. The author has used the names as they appear in *Possession*.

women (Carroll 362). Other critics, however, argue that Byatt "paints a credible satire of the academic world, as well as overzealous feminists" and criticizes lesbianism through her portrayal of Leonora, a modern, competitive expert on LaMotte, who "wears too much jewelry, over-interprets LaMotte's works to suit her own political dogma, and tries to seduce anything in her path" (Cheng 18).

As noted by critics, Byatt uses many of her female characters to raise pressing questions about femininity. For example, "Byatt has Christabel address both the issue of male construction of femaleness and the question of woman-in-herself," as Christabel challenges both the patriarchal structure of her society and notions about femininity itself (Campbell 118). And throughout the book, Byatt "shows women's longing to live an autonomous, self-sufficient life without dependence on men" and "explores the ambiguities of freedom for creative women," addressing the difficulties faced by women in the academic and artistic spheres during the Victorian period as well as today (121). Christabel is often recognized "as a victim of Victorian repression and stereotyping" as well as a character who affirms "qualities of strength, insight, and versatility that persist throughout the generations" (121).

One lens more or less neglected by critics, however, is the personal rejection, embracement, or augmentation of typical ideas about femininity by the primary female characters in the book. Byatt utilizes Christabel as well as nearly every female character in *Possession* to critique the widespread conception that, in order to be successful, a woman must separate herself from the rest of her gender by shedding her femininity. Through her female characters, Byatt demonstrates why the apparent necessity of discarding femininity to achieve success exists, evidences the ways in which this is a pernicious perception, and shows that this belief continues to the present day. Specifically, Byatt uses strong, independent female characters, chiefly Christabel and Maud, to point out how competent, successful women often reject femininity and the reasons they feel the need to do so. Inversely, she also focuses on other female characters who embrace femininity to varying degrees, namely Val and Ellen, to reveal the negative effects that emerge when women do accept a feminine extreme.

Byatt utilizes Christabel... to critique the widespread conception that...a woman must separate herself from the rest of her gender...

Throughout her letters to Ash, Christabel appears dismissive, even disgusted, in her attitudes towards her own sex. "She liked things women like—pretty things—she was no reader," assigning other women traits she cannot sympathize with herself (Byatt 191). Christabel simultaneously casts a typical woman as a frivolous being and separates herself from the label; she obviously self-identifies as a reader, or a scholar, rather than a typical woman. Later, her attitudes toward

women surface again in the note that her own "journal must be free from the repetitious vapours and ecstatic sighing of commonplace girls with commonplace feelings" (369). Clearly, Christabel distinguishes herself as a different variety than these "commonplace girls," who are overly emotional and silly.

In her self-classification as a thinker and a writer, Christabel also takes means to separate herself from femininity. "I speak to you as I speak to all those who most possess my thoughts—to Shakespeare, to Thomas Browne, to John Donne, to John Keats," she tells Ash. These sentiments remove her from her gender by suggesting that she holds a place in a member of an elite male class of thinkers and writers (195). She also implies that something about her language and mode of thought is inherently masculine; those she understands best, those whose thought patterns are most similar to hers, and who would understand her best, are men.

Considering the lack of gender equality in the nineteenth century, perhaps it is no wonder that successful women took pains to separate themselves from the general female population. Ash writes, "I know to my own cost the unhappiness that lack of freedom can bring to women—the undesirability, the painfulness, the waste, of the common restrictions placed upon them" (Byatt 203). He refers to the perceptions of "feminine weakness" and "the vulnerability of women" that were commonly accepted facts in the Victorian era; females were widely considered weaker than men not only physically, but socially and mentally (Calder 17). Perhaps as a response to these misogynist beliefs and common restrictions on women and the resulting waste that they produced, even successful women in the Victorian period often subscribed to the "system of sexual privilege based upon women controlling negative qualities conventionally associated with their sex" (David 48). In this light, Christabel's anti-feminine comments may express her need for artistic self-preservation rather than a deliberate, malicious degradation of her sex.

This strategy of sacrificing femininity for success, though, "seems to leave us with one authentic sex and the other performing as emotional and intellectual transvestite." The insecurity and cognitive dissonance that remains also seep through Christabel's writing (David 48). She agonizes, "And shall I give up—so? I who have fought for my autonomy against family and society? No, I will not. In the known purpose of appearing—inconsequential, tergiversatory, infirm of purpose, and feminine—I ask you—is it possible for you to walk in Richmond Park?" (Byatt 208). These lines, fraught with emotion, carry implications about Christabel's beliefs and anxieties about femininity. Her list-style presentation of derogatory adjectives indicates that she equates a feminine being with one who is also "inconsequential," "tergiversatory," (a person who is circumlocutory or evasive), and weak, or "infirm of purpose" (208). It also reveals Christabel's deep insecurity about appearing as a stereotypically feminine figure, which she apparently desires to avoid at almost all costs. Judging from her distressed, halting, doubtful language, her anxiousness to avoid appearing "feminine" nearly prevents

her from suggesting a meeting with Ash, who she connects with both intellectually and romantically.

Christabel's anxiety about her femininity also affects her writing. "The Muse has forsaken me—as she may mockingly forsake all Women, who dally with her [*sic*]," Christabel writes, expressing her deep-seated fear that, as a woman, she is somehow less capable of artistic expression (216). Perhaps she has absorbed to some extent the Victorian societal belief that, for women, "the first thing of importance is to be content to be inferior to men—inferior in mental power, in the same proportion that you are inferior in bodily strength" (Ellis 99). It is also possible that her insecurities stem from "the damaging effects of male literary history on women writers" (Rosenman 70-71). Regardless of the root cause, Christabel feels the need to escape from the restrictions on Victorian women by distinguishing herself as entirely separate from her gender. Despite her efforts in this direction, however, she is still unable to escape her insecurities of being intellectually and socially inferior and thus less capable of producing real and valuable artistic works.

[Byatt illustrates] the inverse relationship between observable feminine characteristics and...success.

Anxieties about femininity and the perceived need to cast it off in order to achieve success also persist in the attitudes and behaviors of the modern women in *Possession*. Maud, for example, who most readers would agree is generally a successful person in her career and (at least by the end of the book) successful in love, also takes measures to avoid appearing feminine. She is typically described with adjectives such as "pointed and sharp" and "severe and preoccupied," descriptive words that contradict a feminine stereotype (238, 519).

Also notable for this discussion, Maud tucks her long, blonde hair, a primal symbol of femininity, "always inside some sort of covering, hidden away" (65). She views her "yellow hair" and "perfectly regular features," or "doll-mask," as an occasional annoyance and even a hindrance to her career (64). She acknowledges that "the doll-mask she saw had nothing to do with her, nothing" and then launches into a short narrative, explaining that "the feminists ...had hissed and cat-called, assuming her crowning glory to be the seductive and marketable product of an inhumanely tested bottle" (64). These experiences cause Maud to wear her hair "almost shaved in her early teaching days, a vulnerable stubble on a white and shivering scalp" (64).

In order to be taken seriously in the literary, academic world, Maud must, or feels that she must, project traits normally associated with masculinity; or, at the very least, Maud feels that she must not come across as overtly feminine. And although her friend Fergus employs a tirade of poetic manipulation to successfully persuade Maud to grow out her hair, her compulsion to keep it covered after it grows

continues. Essentially, Maud stifles and denies her femininity in the modern age in similar ways as Christabel denies it in Victorian times. Both women separate themselves from the rest of their sex for similar reasons; both yearn to be taken seriously in the literary, academic world, unhampered by stereotypes associated with their gender, and both seem to feel it is impossible to do so while being identified as a typically feminine figure.

The inverse relationship between observable feminine characteristics and the capacity for success is further illustrated in the increasing femininity of Byatt's character, Val. Initially, although Val does not necessarily come across as masculine, she also doesn't seem to be associated with femininity in any particular way. "In the early days she had lots of quiet opinions," a "rough voice gentled, between London and Liverpool," "expected no one to approach and invited no one," and "projected a sort of calm, a lack of strife" (15). Beyond noting that Val had "a soft, brown uncertain look," her physical appearance at this stage lacks commentary; rather, her strength, work ethic, and intelligence is emphasized; "she made [Roland] always say what he thought, she argued points, she worried constantly about whether she was, whether they both were, working hard enough" (15).

In these early days, Roland and Val work within an unequivocally equal partnership. "They signed up for the same courses and joined the same society; they sat together in seminars and went together to the Nation Film Theatre; they had sex together and moved together into a one-roomed flat in their second year." In short, they seem to do and share everything together, and financial and domestic responsibilities are no exception to their exhaustive equality; "they lived frugally off a diet of porridge and lentils and beans and yogurt...they shared book-buying; they were both entirely confined to their grants" (15).

The dynamics of Roland's and Val's relationship shift, however, and their equality comes to an end. "Roland noticed, as he himself, had his success, Val said less and less, and when she argued, offered him increasingly his own ideas" (16). Apparently discouraged by failures in the academic world, Val abandons her literary career in order to "acquire an IBM golfball typewriter and do academic typing at home in the evenings and various well-paid temping jobs during the day" (17). Interestingly, at the same time that she resigns herself to a life "to which she almost never referred without the adjective 'menial,'" Val also acquires a more stereotypically but unarguably feminine personae (17). Almost immediately following her abandonment of her career in the academic world, she starts wearing "long crepey shirts" or "a tight black skirt and a black jacket with padded shoulders over a pink silk shirt," crimson nails, and high heels (18). Val becomes "carefully made up with pink and brown eyeshadow, brushed blusher along the cheekbone and plummy lips" (18). Perhaps most notable is the comparison between Roland and Val after she begins her "menial" life; while Roland heads off to pursue his literary passions, Val is "still applying her [new] workday face" (27).

Val's decline in both successfulness and attractiveness to Roland coincide almost perfectly with her acquisition of characteristics and behavior traditionally identified as feminine. Not only does she begin putting more effort into dressing herself, but also she begins filling a role closer to that of a domestic housewife than an equal partner. Instead of Roland and Val living frugally off simple foods together, Val assumes the cooking responsibilities and starts making "complicated" meals, like "grilled marinated lamb, ratatouille, and hot Greek bread" (22). And as she becomes more domestic and feminine, she moves away from tenaciously arguing her quiet opinions toward discarding opinions altogether. "I don't think anything. It's not my place to think anything," she says to Roland (238). Roland himself notes the change, lamenting that the "real Val" was "lost, transmuted, in abeyance" (238). It is no coincidence to Byatt that Val loses her opinionated voice at the same time she begins embracing high heels, heavy makeup, and other physical, shallow, but highly recognizable symbols of femininity.

The only female character who appears to embrace typical femininity wholeheartedly is Ellen, Randolph Ash's wife, who, despite her lack of children, seems more wrapped up in domestic details than any other female character. Much of her journal consists of reporting the details of her home life: "I have had a sore throat and violent attacks of sneezing—maybe from all the dust aroused by the cleaning efforts," she records (244). She also reports that "we talked quite girlishly" and worries in writing, "I am unimaginative or too instinctive or intuitive in my trust," almost all qualities which would have been strongly associated with women in Victorian times (245, 243). Further, Ellen does not seem disappointed to be looked at as less intelligent because she is a woman. After playing chess with Herbert, she writes that "he was pleased to tell me that I played very well for a Lady—I was content to accept this, since I won handsomely" (247).

On the other hand, although Ellen accepts her own femininity and place within the domestic sphere, she communicates misgivings that womanhood might be limiting. She reports, "I slept badly and as a result had a strange fragmented dream in which I was playing chess with Herbert Baulk, who had decreed that my Queen could move only one square, as his King did" (248). This is when Ellen's frustration with the patriarchal system seems to emerge, even if only subconsciously; she explains, "I knew there was injustice here but could not in my dreaming folly realize that this was to do with the existence of my King who sat rather large and red on the back line and seemed to be incapacitated" (248). Through the metaphor of the chess game, Ellen notes female oppression, saying, "I could see the moves She should have made, like errors in a complicated pattern of knitting or lace—but she must only lumpishly shuffle back and forth, one square at a time" (248). In fact, Ellen openly indicates the perpetrator, recalling that "Mr. Baulk (always in my dream) said calmly, 'You see I told you could not win,' and I saw it was so, but was unreasonably agitated and desirous above all of my moving my Queen freely across the diagonals" (248). The most convincing piece of evidence that Ellen recognizes the limits placed on her by femininity comes in her commentary at the end of the dream when she notes, "it is odd,

when I think of it, that in chess the female may make the large runs and cross freely in all ways—in life it is much otherwise" (248).

This particular dream of Ellen's reveals more than anything else in her journals. She resents the injustice of a patriarchal society that dooms her to "lumpishly shuffle back and forth" rather than reaching her true potential. Ellen recognizes, at least subconsciously, that in the patriarchal structure of her society, she simply cannot ultimately win as a woman.

Despite her awareness of the limits placed on her because of her femininity, Ellen does not attempt to separate herself from her gender. She stays immersed in the domestic sphere and seems to identify herself, first and foremost, as a famous poet's wife, an idea touched on by Maud, who points out, "Look at Dorothy Wordsworth's marvelous prose—if she had supposed she could be a writer—instead of a sister—what might she not have done? What I want to ask is—why did Ellen write her journal?" (239). Maud makes a cogent point. Ellen writes well and deeply—of humanity, femininity, and religion. She is never recognized for her written work because she does not take the pains to separate herself from her sex and reject femininity. Because Ellen is categorized and perceives herself not as a philosopher, poet, or writer, but as a woman, recognition for her works becomes impossible.

Because Ellen is categorized and perceives herself not as a philosopher, poet, or writer, but as a woman, recognition for her works becomes impossible.

Through the portrayals of Christabel, Maud, and Val, Byatt points to the irony of feminists who, in their quest for equality, cast off the rest of their gender in an effort to identify themselves as masculine and achieve success. As Lynne Agress notes, they are participating in a society where "women writers and intellectuals use their influence to perpetuate society's biases against women" (9). However, in the characters of Ellen and Val, Byatt reveals the social risks for those who refused to separate themselves from femininity. Ultimately, *Possession* makes it clear that femininity has not made the progress that most would hope. With complex, realistically conflicted female characters, Byatt asserts that many women still feel stuck in an impossible choice between femininity and success.

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Mother and Child

A single mother, a recent convert to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, with her daughter.

Brian Hoffman

Infertile

Katie Wade-Neser

What I'm trying to say is, the woman never cuts a break.
They seem to knock her like a door, up one side, down the other.
They play Rook late at night,
Betty and Roger from next door, her husband, laughing at the cards she plays,
The silly woman she is.
On good nights she plays a hand the way she was taught,
"Better late than never" they all say.

She crinkles those words through the gaps in her teeth and swallows them whole,
every Tuesday and Thursday,
a day between to digest.

The real scene, the one we remember, is in her front yard, and they are laying sod.
In this scene, the woman is the dirt.
She is the worms just come up for a summer rain,
the seed she has watered and watered
and just won't spring up.
She is all of these things and she is kneeling there as if to pray,
only she does not pray.
Her face docile and spent she thinks of lying down so the squares of sod
slowly cover her
until there is just a woman shape in the grass
they will mow over on Saturdays.

Grace

Danielle Chelom Leavitt

I received Grace's telephone number from a Christian missionary woman in Rwanda. "She might need volunteers," the woman prompted. "Call her." That evening I did.

We arranged to meet downtown in Kigali at a hotel called Okapi. My friend, Innocent, knew the way and he agreed to take me, and we set out just after ten in the morning. The windows were down the entire way into the city, our faces covered in dust when we stopped in front of the hotel. I first saw Grace outside the hotel doors on the side of the road. She was beautiful, tall and curved with hair in long rope-braids woven tightly to her scalp. I don't remember what I said when I stepped from the car. I'm sure it was rehearsed and awkward. Most likely I spoke too loud, too fast, and was friendly but distant. I don't recall her response, but somehow we came to a basic understanding that I would like to visit her shop and that she would lead the way.

In the taxi, we had little to say to each other. Grace gave Innocent directions to the sewing shop where she worked. In Kinyarwandan the shop is called *Amahoro ava Hejuru*, meaning "Peace from Heaven" because it opened after the genocide as a place where widowed women might find work. To find the shop we had to drive away from Kigali's center. Seventeen years ago the city was on fire and covered in blood, home to a genocide that put Rwanda on world news. Innocent fled Kigali just before the genocide erupted, but he returned soon after and observed that no one could imagine a space as forlorn as Kigali in 1994. Now the city is very much alive, so alive that it sweats. On our necks, even while we rode in the car, big tears of dusty perspiration hung. From the car window, I spotted fabric shops up and down the sidewalks, fruit stands, and men with outstretched arms dangling beads. "You wanna buya necklace?" they said with wide grins. Flies thrived. Shops stacked on each other like old, crooked teeth. The roads revolved in roundabouts and

Seventeen years ago the city was on fire and covered in blood...

hills: cement hills in the city's center and green, wet hills of tea and bean fields in the outskirts. The city stirred. Its hum came largely from a transportation phenomenon known as "taximotos": dirt bikes driven by sixteen year old boys at a fraction the cost of regular taxis. The bikes revved up like a dozen bullets shot through the air. The ricochets spun in our eardrums, vibrated our feet. The whole ground pulsated underneath the taximoto wheels. Ten-year-olds grasped cages of chickens; women rode with trunks of bananas strapped to their backs; men hauled five-gallon buckets of brown eggs as they sandwiched cell phones between ears and shoulders; entire families flapped away at 50 mph with goggles over their eyes. *We are alive*, they seemed to say with their livelihoods fastened to their bodies, zipping through the city as if they were antelope on wheels.

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I stepped into Rwanda the summer after my freshman year of college. I knew only one person there, Nancy, who worked for an AID organization and offered me a home in Kigali if I ever wanted to meet Africa. Looking for any excuse to go, enamored with exotic *Rwanda*, and wide-eyed for everything, I developed a project that earned some grant money and flew to Kigali the day after my last final. I would write about Rwanda's post-genocide women, I told my family and Nancy. I was eighteen, barely a woman, if even.

I was two years old, a baby in rural Utah, when Rwanda's genocide commenced. The assassination of Rwanda's president, Juvenal Habyarimana, kicked off the 100-day killing spree that led to nearly one million Rwandan deaths. It was a hot topic then, nearly twenty years ago, when the horror of a modern-day holocaust and outrage of international indifference were fresh. I was fourteen—a freshman in high school—before I even knew that the Rwandan genocide occurred, and by that time most of the shock had subsided. I remember hearing of the genocide for the first time in my speech and debate class, where an enthusiastic upper-classman gave a graphic depiction of the film *Hotel Rwanda*. "The one part that really got me," he said, "was when the car was driving over the piles of bodies."

What is left now is the aftermath of the genocide and all its living witnesses.

The genocide tore through Rwanda a world and lifetime away from me. I have no reportage to add about the disturbance in 1994; that story sailed before I entered elementary school. What is left now is the aftermath of the genocide and all its living witnesses.

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There were nine women who worked in Grace's sewing shop, nine widows: Mirab, Pascaline, Festy, Florence, Terez, Betty, Rosemary, Jane, and Grace. Inside an iron fence they sat at sewing machines, some with babies attached to their breasts,

some too old to have babies. Their feet rocked along the treadles of manual machines with cups of Rwandan tea next to their round hips. They laughed in both high and low tones, and commenced work with a prayer.

In the morning, the ladies sat in a circle for prayer and Bible study. Grace said, "When I found Jesus, I [realized I] was not alone." The other ladies nodded in agreement, their hand-sized Bibles open on their laps. Verses of the New Testament followed them like shadows: "His sweat was as it were great drops of blood." On the wall hung a small print of Jesus Christ bowed on the cross. After prayer, sometimes they danced.

I was no fascination to the ladies. I didn't speak Kinyarwandan, but instead relied on Grace to interpret and translate. Even Grace didn't really know who I was, and I was clumsy in explaining myself. I learned their names right away, but I didn't know much more beyond what to call them. I could guess their ages and how old they might have been when they witnessed the genocide. They knew, perhaps, less of me. They knew my name, but they'd never heard of a place called Utah, where I was from, where there was snow. I tried to explain snow: cold and soft, like cotton ice, covering the entire ground. That distanced us more.

I asked about their children and about being a mother while we cut squares of fabric. They quizzed me on Kinyarwandan words: mother, father, how are you, white girl. I once baked chocolate chip cookies for them, and they pulled off bites with their teeth very slowly, clapping when they swallowed their last mouthfuls. We were silent for a long time while we aligned tiny pieces of cloth in rows before the sewing needle, which darted at a sprint and pierced through. Even when we had nothing to do, we were silent. Words do not necessarily help you see someone.

I danced with them once. We pushed aside a large cutting table and stood in a semi-circle. On the right was Betty, short and supple in traditional clothing. Green, orange, and purple prints hugged her hips and her brittle hair was tied back in a matching head wrap. Her quietude reminded me of a mother or an older sister. Although when she sang, her voice was round and full, like warm water. Next to Betty were Mirab and Terez, who were the oldest of the ladies and both grandmas. They didn't dance with the other ladies, but they beat the drum and clapped their hands. Next to Terez was Festy with her baby, Daniel—only two months old, with cheeks like mangos. Then followed quiet Pascaline with beautiful eyes and Jane who had recently recovered from malaria. Beside Jane was Rosemary, just a few years older than myself with a new baby and a chipped tooth. Florence, at the end, was thin as a tree branch and the tallest of the group. She had a long forehead and wide smile with short teeth. She poked fun at nearly everything: "I'm not going to dance unless you bring more cookies!"

There was no choreography, but they stepped and spun to the same beat. They made fun of my dancing because it was terrible. I couldn't find the beat with my feet, even though my hands clapped it. I moved gracelessly; my arms were in the

air and my eyes on everyone else. Now, as I imagine myself in the sewing shop, I remember this scene. We all watched each other and laughed.

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My first week in Kigali I met and spoke with a man named Fabian who served on Rwanda's supreme court. He'd been a justice since 1979 and watched the entire genocide unfold. I asked him when the ethnic rivalry began, to which he responded: "When did Cain begin to hate Abel? No one can say; it started slowly, with jealousy."

Like most Americans in Rwanda, I was familiar with the basic history of the genocide and a handful of individual stories to accompany the overarching political horror. I knew that the longstanding ethnic competition and tensions between the Rwandan military and Hutu militia groups resulted in their systematically setting out to murder all the Tutsis they could reach, regardless of age or sex. Even political moderates among the Hutu were not spared. I also knew that estimates of the death toll have ranged between 500,000 and over 1,000,000. I spent hours in the Kigali Institute of Education reading books and accounts of the genocide. I knew a lot of facts, and I'd talked to some people.

Although the ethnic categorization instituted by Belgian colonizers established the rivalry, the 1994 genocide was itself a government-sponsored extermination. In the early 1990s, genocide was being rehearsed. The "Hutu Ten Commandments" were published in an anti-Tutsi magazine called *Kangura*, which included commandments like:

- Every Hutu should know that a Tutsi woman, whoever she is, works for the interest of her Tutsi ethnic group. As a result, we shall consider a traitor any Hutu who marries a Tutsi woman, befriends a Tutsi woman, or employs a Tutsi woman as a secretary or a concubine. (Green)

- Every Hutu should know that our Hutu daughters are more suitable and conscientious in their role as woman, wife and mother of the family. Are they not beautiful, good secretaries and more honest? (Green)

- The Hutu should stop having mercy on the Tutsi. (Green)

Radio stations blared government propaganda meant to stir up hatred against the Tutsis. In one broadcast, a reporter told listeners: "Do not kill those cockroaches with a bullet—cut them to pieces with a machete" ("Rwanda Jails Journalist"). Tutsi families with any money would pay their killers to kill them with a gun. Propaganda on the radio portrayed women as temptresses, meant only to ruse and trick Hutu men. Such women must be silenced and killed. Sexual atrocity was

public and encouraged. The instruction for annihilation was graphic, justifying killing and persuading Hutus to violence against their family and neighbors.

People fled to churches for safety, and entire chapels of refugees would be slaughtered under a Hutu priest's instruction. One community—Kibuye—was reduced from 250,000 people to 8,000. On May 10, 1994—the same day 2,500 journalists covered South Africa's victory at the inauguration of Nelson Mandela—over five thousand Rwandan bodies were dumped into the Akagera River.

Death, in many cases, moved in more gradually rather than in a wild blow; cholera and dysentery infected hundreds of thousands. Droves of barely-living bodies were piled onto one another in empty churches, and infection spread in nearly every living thing.

Grace said once that the genocide isn't an event one can understand.

Women knew they must prepare their children to either be killed or orphaned. They held their sweet children by the shoulders and the cheeks and had those unearthly conversations under beds, in closets, or in shrubs. At the end of the genocide, an approximate 55,000 children were heads of households and more than 300,000 children were orphans.

The pictures scare me. I visited, only once, the Rwandan Genocide Memorial Museum in Kigali. I was there alone, just before closing. The memorial sits on a hill where over 200,000 Rwandans once laid. The man at the lobby desk told me that their souls sank into the soil where we stood, and their bones were only a few feet below us. After only half of the exhibit, I chose not to look anymore, skipping the second half.

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It is impossible for me to tell these stories accurately. My understanding of the genocide is overgeneralized, pared down to the skeleton of the conflict, the facts, the statistics. I am largely ignorant of the deeper implications: the horror and sorrow that followed the genocide like a sweeping cloud, the burden of witness, the inability to comprehend. Grace said once that the genocide isn't an event one can understand. She, who had been slapped with living it and hearing the statistics, couldn't make sense of it. She and the rest of those to whom the genocide bore its hellish face most nakedly cannot understand.

But there is an irony in the conversation of the genocide. In Rwanda, I interacted with many American expatriates and diplomats who spewed fact and story as if they had the genocide figured out. I, too, have been eager to organize fact and story into meaning. However, in my brazen, factual wade through the events of 1994, I missed the essentially human aspect of the genocide: the toxic hearts

of perpetrators, the millions of seared survivors, the sharp, perfect depth of forgiveness. My own words are insufficient; they reach to understand. But Rwandans, the very witnesses, do not speak of the genocide so flippantly. They do not claim to understand. How do you make sense of madness? When the event is organized into a curt timeline and statistics, the madness is inevitably diminished. Information presented this way is understandable. But there are no words sturdy enough to carry the fear of being raped or the soul possessed and dissolved in brutal anger.

Grace once showed me pictures of her husband and father, who were murdered at the top of a hill near her house. She pointed up the hill marking the spot where they fell, just a few feet from us, and all she uttered was "good man."

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In the months immediately following the genocide, Rwanda faced not only a crushed infrastructure, but also millions of displaced citizens and a state made up of women who had endured much. At the time, women made up 70% of Rwanda's living population. In addition to being rife with sexual diseases, Rwandan women bore the stigma of being the mothers of illegitimate children, and they held legally vulnerable positions with fragile claims to their late husbands' land and property.

Beginning in the 1960s, millions of Rwandans had escaped for Uganda, Tanzania, or the Congo in an exodus that climbed exponentially in the early 1990s. Thousands died in refugee camps during disease epidemics. Most living refugees returned to Rwanda after their camps were attacked in the 1995 and 1996 retaliations, but a period of reconciliation began in late 1994 when the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda was established and traditional village court systems were reintroduced.

A tradition called *Umaganda* was instituted, which is a day of work that takes place the last Saturday of each month. From 9:00 am to 12:00 pm, all stores, businesses, and restaurants shut down so that all Rwandans (in the city and village alike) can stop everything to clean and repair their communities. I participated in one *Umaganda*, in which I helped rebuild a road. People trade off using community tools, and they work on whatever needs repairing. Regardless of ethnic group, they work side by side.

In the early 2000s, Rwanda joined the East African Community and the Commonwealth of Nations. Rwanda's economy, which was nearly decimated during the genocide, grew rapidly. Rwanda's new government and its peacekeeping strategies replaced the flag, anthem, and constitution. Rwanda was, almost literally, reborn.

The sewing shop where I worked with Grace and the ladies was one of many cooperatives that began after the genocide. In the midst of Rwanda's rebirth, the

government encouraged Rwandan women to "rebuild" their lives by learning a vocational trade, participating in income earning activities, and counseling with other women. Co-operatives and NGOs headed and run by Rwandan widows or foreign aid groups sprouted in Kigali and the Rwandan countryside. In bakeries, crop fields, factories, sewing plants, ranches, pottery shops, mills, and farms, women met other women, and on the sides of hills, they talked.

Today, only seventeen years after genocide, more than 50% of Rwanda's parliamentary members are female, the world's highest percent of women in a national governing body. The majority of Rwandan babies ride on the backs of the women who work the land and care for the cows. Women walk kilometers down and up the hill in the early morning to get water for their children. Women prepare the food; it is because of women that people eat. Women take care of sick children. They take care of everybody. And still they have time to dance.

Though they cannot understand the genocide, Grace says, they cannot forget. Remembering is how they heal; the cry of a baby can remind them, the slam of a door, the whites of eyes. Their bodies are symbols that will not let them forget—they bleed, shedding their own blood once a month like a tithe, they nourish their babies with their own milk. Rwanda is called "The Land of a Thousand Hills." The ground is complex, like a woman lying on her side, the curve of earth like shoulder, waist, hip. In the early morning, mothers trudge down the hill for water, with sleeping babies on their backs, and again in the afternoon, the barefaced sun on their chests. They sweat. They are familiar with blood and sweat alike. Verses of the New Testament follow them like shadows: "His sweat was as it were great drops of blood."

Today, only seventeen years after genocide, more than 50% of Rwanda's parliamentary members are female.

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One Sunday, Grace invited me to her home. I took a taxi to a steeped corner of the city where Grace lived with her family. Their neighborhood climbed up the side of a hill. Concrete mud houses hung on slants, and dirt roads were chiseled with canals from months of running rainwater. It was May and because of the rain, the car couldn't make it up the slick incline, so Grace met me on the side of the hill. There were no cars in that neighborhood, and naked children crowded the car's side doors. They tapped the windows, pressed their faces to the glass, and said "*Muzungu! Muzungu!*" which means, "*White girl, white girl!*"

In the dark I could see only the flicker of fire and shadows. Grace greeted me, and we walked through ankle-deep mud alleyways to her house, past a chicken coop with 400 chickens. Each house was strung to another on a continuous laundry line.

Grace lived with her widowed mother and sister and all of their children in the same two rooms where they had lived through the genocide. Her mother sat by us while we cut fat, firm potatoes into wedges on the dirt floor and boiled isombay leaves with nuts and oil. With Grace's daughter, Kiri, and niece, Vanissa, we peeled green plantains, scrubbed beans, and poked beef. Over charcoal in a blackened closet we let the food turn soft. Sitting on a bench by the water bowl, Grace told me of 1993 and 1994, the years when she had her first baby, Kiri, and the years when Rwanda's genocide took speed.

"I do not like to talk about it so much," she began.

She gave birth to Kiri in January, just months before the genocide erupted. She hid and prayed for weeks under a bed. Their neighbor was a good friend of Grace's father, who had recently been killed, and he let Grace and Kiri live under the bed in his house even though he was Hutu. He left the house at night to kill other Tutsi and then came home and slept in the bed above their hiding place. Grace was under the bed with Kiri for three weeks, eating only what food was snuck to her, nursing Kiri with a loose hand over the baby's face to keep the sucking quiet. "Please God," she had prayed, "let me die by a bullet and not by a knife."

Grace was under the bed with Kiri for three weeks...nursing Kiri with a hand over the baby's face to keep the sucking quiet.

She continued: *Other men tried to use sex as a weapon. Not so many Tutsi women were killed as men. They killed brothers and fathers, and then husbands and children. When a woman was left alone—no husband or child—she wasn't killed because they said her soul would kill her from pain. At night, groups of Hutu men broke into the homes of these widows and raped them.*

And what happens when she gets pregnant--pregnant with the baby whose father murdered her husband and other children? What happens when she is its mother? Women were sad. We made sadness in our bellies and held life behind our breasts. And we were in a war with ourselves, between hating and loving our illegitimate babies who were born sad, with no choice, and in a place of dying women and other children who could not be loved by their mothers. Neighbors killed neighbors, fathers betrayed their children and wives in inhumane ways. The city was burning, and dogs were eating human bones and meat from the piles of bodies in the road. Still, I was only hiding and praying. Oh, God, I prayed. Do you smell this?

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I never asked Grace if any of her own children were conceived through rape, though her daughter and nieces, just younger than me, fit into that generation. The other ladies also had children who would have been about that age. I don't know all of the ladies' stories in detail, but I know they are similar to Grace's.

One Hutu widow, Mirab, described the hollowness she knew when her husband climbed into bed in the dark with blood on his clothes. And she remembered her own silence.

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I have struggled to remember Grace's face. It is difficult to conjure up an image of her without a photo. I have a few recordings of her speaking, but beyond those brief scraps of time, the sound and rhythm of her voice are gone as well. There is one voice, however, that I recall. I heard it one night in particular, and it came from a woman who worked across the street from where I lived with Nancy. The woman cared for a bean field. During the day, she picked and hoed with her baby tied to her back, and I saw her when I left the house. After the entire neighborhood was dark, I heard her through my window, singing. I can still hear her, singing and splashing water.

Now the water is pouring, I am listening to it slap against the ground. In the morning, if it has not already dried up, there will be a puddle outside the gate where she sat. The woman is giving her child a bath. If I looked out the window, I would see only their shadows, the elongated arms of a woman drying off her baby, the sway of dim water, and her silhouette as she opens her shirt to nurse. Finally it is night when the naked baby is cleaned and unstrapped from her sweating back, when she can hold him next to her breast in the crook of her elbow. She is glad to be invisible in the darkness with her child. They are still, and grace can find her.

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Two Women Working at Quarry

These women work hard at the Assin Foso quarry breaking rocks from the mountain behind their small town. They bring their small children to help.

Brian Hoffman

Women's Values Speaking Between Their Words:

Women's Correspondence in Early Nineteenth Century America

Rachel Mahrt Degn

Abstract

In this paper I examine folklore gathered from women's letters circa 1830 to see what they reveal about how women used correspondence to reinforce and express their values. Through some traditional expressions of folklore (categorized as customary, oral, material, and belief) women demonstrate their values: interpersonal connection and duty.

Introduction

In nineteenth century America, the Industrial Revolution created jobs for men outside of the home, and the cottage industries in which women participated declined. The result was the rise of the "cult of domesticity" in which women worked only inside the home and this was seen as a sign of their household's prosperity. Women adopted the home as their domain, and their duties and social obligations stemmed from their role there. While men could communicate with friends and associates at work, women had household duties and children to care for and thus had little opportunity to interact with friends. Their interaction with other women and men came mainly through letters.

Letter writing for personal purposes seemed to be the domain of the "angel of the house," and even today those who lament the death of the letter are often women. Letter-writing resonates with women: typically, they not only write more letters than men, but they also cherish—and sometimes keep—the letters they receive. Because letters have been so valued by women, we see what else women value by closely examining the content of the letters they wrote.

Approach

The study of folklore offers an effective approach for studying the values expressed in everyday correspondence. Folklore theory focuses on the common practices within groups and offers an ideal framework for studying women's letter-writing patterns. One scholar explains what is necessary for such a group of women to be considered a folk group:

> The term "folk" can refer to *any group of people whatsoever* who share at least one common factor. . . . A member of the group may not know all other members, but he will probably know the common core of traditions belonging to the group, traditions which help the group to have a sense of group identity. (Dundes 11)

The "common core of traditions" often emerges from a group of women living during the same time period with the same social expectations. Of course, that is not to say that nineteenth century women were homogenous. During the 1800s, individual women had unique interests and were involved in various social groups, just as today's women. However, despite their differences, these women had traditions, roles, and overlapping interests that bound them together and contributed to their sense of belonging to a group with other women.

Women's letters written in New England between 1830 and 1832 reveal a "common core of traditions" of women as a folk group. Because letters were the main source of communication at this time, we can assume that letters are a concentrated repository of women's interests and values. Other forms of communication did not yet exist—the telegraph was not available to the American public until 1844; the telephone was invented around 1876; and e-mail, blogs, Facebook, and Twitter were more than a century from being available. Through these letters from the past, we can determine that these New England women valued duty, piety, and their connections with others. Discovering these values in letters from the past shows how letter-writing created and reinforced the values of women as a folk group.

Folklore in the Letters

In the letters, we see folklore patterns—that is, the "things" they created, including the words they spoke and wrote (oral folklore), the activities they organized and took part in (customary folklore), and the physical items they made (material folklore)—patterns which help us interpret the women's experiences and draw conclusions about what these women valued.

Explanations

Nineteenth-century women generally began letters with an explanation of the purpose of the letter. Such an explanation can be seen in a letter dated 4 January 1830 from Eliza Way Champlain Riley to William Champlain: "I sat down last evening to write you but being seized with a sudden and violent pain in the side I was obliged to give it up—this morning your epistle was handed me and I was not a little surprised and grieved at its contents" (Riley). A letter from Harriet Gardner to Susan Bigelow Greene was written primarily to answer an invitation to a ball: "Accept our thanks my dear Susan for your polite invitation to the ball and our regrets that we cannot accept it" (Gardner). Another letter from Lucy Cargill Waldo to Susan Judd, not dated, reveals attachment as a motive for writing: "Under a deep sense of my being destitute of those literary endowments and other abilities, which are so requisite for this purpose. . . . But being impelled by motives of pure affection, and an anxious desire for hearing from you, I have at length concluded to write you a few lines" (Waldo). And still another woman succinctly reports that her letter is informational: "As I am almost blind I will write a few lines to give you a little more particular account of Mother" (Allen).

"Being impelled by motives of pure affection, and an anxious desire for hearing from you..."

The explanation at the beginning of a letter—sometimes an expression to convey or request information and sometimes simply to renew a connection—might have been deemed necessary because the recipient paid the postage (when it was sent via post versus in the hand of a traveling friend), and a purposeful letter showed respect for the recipient's time and expense. The explanation also echoes the familiar form of a house call, in which the visitor often stated the purpose of the visit if it was not immediately apparent.

The writer often explained the timing of the letter. For example, several of these women seemed hurried to write the letters. In fact, the hurried nature might be signature of the writing style of the time, according to Estelle Jelinek, who says that "diaries, letters, and journals . . . [were] accessible forms for women whose emotional, intellectual and practical lives [were] fragmented by domestic responsibilities that leave them little leisure time to contemplate or integrate their experiences" (qtd. in Brady 171). The explanation of timing might also be a way for the writer to enter into the writing of the letter, or, in other words, an established way to avoid writer's block.

Covering Weaknesses

In many of the letters, the women expressed awareness of their weakness in writing. The women would frame this expression in different ways, through

humor, exaggerated eloquence, or off-handed comments implying that they hoped the reader would like the letter. This is an example of the last: "I will endeavour to find something to say to you and I trust my letters will be welcome should they be filled only with my own nonsense" (Gardner). Books prescribing the "correct manner" in which to write letters had been circulating since the 1600s. The insecurity displayed in the letters might have been, in part, because the women feared falling short of these prescriptive patterns.

This insecurity appears in most of the letters I examined, whether they were written by women or men, so the form itself may not be exclusive to women. However, women addressing perceived deficiencies in their letters reveals what they valued and expected in a letter.

Charlotte Ann Ball handles her self-deprecation with humor at the end of her sloppily handwritten letter, dated 30 March 1832:

> PS I expect you will have a letter from Mr. Morrison he said he had written to you [*sic*] I hope you will excuse this writing as it is a pen of my own making and a very poor one it is. I have done nothing but make blots ever since I commenced writing to you but to make the best of it I will just say what one of Mr. Upgoods scholars wrote him in a composition
>
> My pen is poor
> My ink is pale
> My love to you shall never fail. (Ball)

These apologies and self-deprecations were the most intense when the rest of the letter seemed somewhat formal, which may indicate that this acknowledgement of weakness was a custom observed to the greatest extent between women who did not know each other well. Perhaps the women felt the need to appear humble or to preempt their correspondent's possible mockery by acknowledging the presence of errors at the beginning of the letter.

These apologies and self-deprecations were the most intense when the rest of the letter seemed somewhat formal...

Another woman, Lucy Cargill Waldo, is considerably harder on herself in her letter dated January 1830:

> Under a deep sense of my being destitute of those literary endowments and other abilities, which are so requisite for this purpose,—it is with the most peculiar diffidence that I presume to comply with your polite solicitation, at your departure, of my writing to you. . . . —I have at length concluded to write you a

> few lines: relying on your candour and generosity, to excuses all imperfections, and pardon the intrusion which they may occasion. (Waldo)

In this selection we see Lucy pleading with her correspondent to excuse her inability to write eloquently, including direct requests that the recipient "pardon the intrusion." These kinds of self-deprecation may lead modern readers to conclude that the letter writers didn't think their letter was worth reading because of the poor quality of the writing. Yet, in the very act of excusing it, they vindicate it. Charlotte makes "the best of it" and showcases her ready humor, while Lucy mounds vocabulary and eloquence that turn her apology Aristotelian—a defense rather than an excuse.

One story shared through a letter shows the power that women placed in well-written letters. In one dated 4 January 1830, Eliza Way Champlain Riley explains to William Champlain:

> Mrs Lith was to see me a few evenings since and said that Mr. Noartham had been lately on to Washington where he learn'd that thick Abe came near being turned out of office. [. . .] she understood that his office was in jeopardy and that Mrs. Penny wrote to a gentleman at Washington begging him to inderceed [*sic*] with the Post Master in Uncle Abe's behalf. The letter was so ablely written (for it appears she is a woman of talent) that the gentleman instead of saying a word himself presented the letter to the Post Master and her eloquence prevailed. (Riley)

This story shows the persuasive power of talented women letter-writers. Their awareness of this potential power might have made them even more self-conscious of their weaknesses being laid out on paper. One letter-writer was so ashamed of her poor writing that she asked the recipient to destroy it when she received it: "This silly letter my dear Susan I wish you to destroy I have written in great haste to night because I wished to send the first opportunity to you" (Gardner). Gardner's letter ended the same way it began: with a defense for the poor writing and a plea to be understood and not ridiculed.

By showing vulnerability through revelation of weakness, these women showed a willingness to connect with the recipient; the veiled vindication was a protection just in case the recipient really was inclined to ridicule the mistakes the writer made. The women were reaching for connection at the same time as they were fearful of jeopardizing it. Here we seem to hit one of the connecting commonalities among women: a desire for connection. The letters that didn't contain the self-offering/self-defense might have been between correspondents who already trusted each other enough to not need the validation or the ritual of vulnerability in order to connect.

Charlotte's self-deprecation and humor were directed to her classmate, while Lucy Cargill Waldo was writing to a schoolteacher who boarded at her house for a time. Lucy might have felt nervous writing to someone who knew and taught the "correct" way to write a letter, and taught penmanship and grammar. No doubt their relationships influenced how these women chose to excuse what they imagined might be evaluated as poor writing. They felt it was necessary to do so.

Everyday Work

Some letter-writers described their material lore and thus gave insight into their connections with other people when they mentioned the physical things they gave, received, or made. In their letters the women mentioned cutting their own pens, making silk drapes, receiving and reading books, making rings, and gathering flowers for May Day to post on people's doors (Ball, Gardner, Searle, Johnson, Adams, respectively). It is notable that the women didn't mention this material folklore for its own sake: items mentioned were noteworthy only because of their relationship with people. For example, Charlotte mentioned the pen she had made because she was using it and wanted to excuse its excessive blotting (Ball); Harriet mentioned the drapes because Miss Leavitt was making them, and "Mrs. Salisbury thinks they give us all a new grace" (Gardner). Lucy mentioned a book because it was "very useful and interesting to my younger girls" (Searle). Mary mentioned the flowers because they were part of the festivities of May Day, and she wanted to know if Charlotte had participated as well (Johnson). Sarah mentioned a ring only because it was for her brother, and she did "hope [it] will please him" (Gardner). Women connected to their community these items, which enabled them to write, gain approval of other women, share activities, or share gifts.

"Tell Lucinda she must exercise much dignity and discretion in the discharge of her duties."

Religious Beliefs and Family Duties

Women's letters in the 1800s were replete with opinions, scriptural and poetic quotes, and maxims. Women's beliefs stood out especially in letters, written during times of crisis, such as sickness, contention in the family, and death. These women referenced their duty, whether it was to be a strong member of a family or to be a good Christian. In fact, the religious and familial duties were often indistinguishable.

Several of the letter-writers encouraged the recipients to behave well, especially towards family members. Susan Eager Bride urged the recipient of her letter, "You must be a good boy and help her all you can and be sure and take good care of the children" (Bride). Sarah Bigelow Adams said, "Tell Lucinda she must

exercise much dignity and discretion in the discharge of her duties, and will I hope find time to write me" (Adams). Obedience to family duty merited the precious time and space letter writers used to address it.

One family responsibility mentioned frequently in the letters was the duty of a wife. In a letter dated 27 June 1831, Eliza Way Champlain Riley defended herself against an accusation that she was neglecting her duty towards her aunt, who cared for her after Eliza's mother's death. Throughout Eliza's letter, she protests that she has a duty to obey her husband, who will not allow the aunt to live with them. She unequivocally expresses her feelings on duty to her husband: "I married him unconditionally as I esteem a conditional marriage no better than prostitution" (Riley). Eliza's sense of duty puts her husband before all, and she used that sentiment in her favor to avoid taking care of her aged aunt.

Lucy Lane Allen accepts the dual duty of taking care of her mother and acting according to her duties as a Christian:

> I have tried to nurse her [Lucy's mother] as well as I could and will do all in my power, I have not left home or been out once this winter. I have had a fatiguing winter but it is my lot and why should I complain if I am doing my duty to my family it is a great consolation it is no loss to me to stay at home. (Allen)

Lucy's child died, and she feels duty-bound to bear the loss like a saint:

> You can never feel what it is to part with a child until you experience it, although I have so many left, yet I miss little F. the same her place is just as vacant, although I mourn I hope I have always received it aright I do not murmur. (Allen)

The theme of living a Christian life is also shown through telling of church attendance, relating religious maxims, or encouraging the recipient to heed the same sense of religious duty that the writer feels. Susan Eager Bride mentions her church attendance in passing as if it were something expected that she do: "I went to an ordination last Sabbath eve at Salem Street Meeting house" (Bride). Sarah Patrick Gale expressed her duty to religious piety as she closed her letter about the death of a man in the neighborhood: "Perhaps my dear Niece, we may never see each other again in this world may we be so happy as to meet our judge in peace if we are but found washed in his blood and clothed in his righteousness we shall receive a welcome reception" (Gale). During a time of mourning, she reminds her niece of their duty to their Lord, which she makes clear is the most important thing, even more important than meeting again in their lifetimes.

As they correspond through letters, these women reveal that they take for granted that the women to whom they are writing know and value the duties they are bound to. They admonish, share maxims, and relate their faith that helps them

during hard circumstances as expressions of the duty they feel as members of families and as Christians. This sense of duty takes different forms depending on the situation, and it comes out during times of stress and mourning. This sense of duty helps create a "sense of group identity" necessary within the folk group.

These women whose letters I've analyzed comprise a folk group because they share the commonalities of self-deprecation, talking about objects primarily when those objects create a connection with someone else, and referencing their duty to family and to God. The expressions of those commonalities suggest that they desired to connect with other women. They show interest in people rather than objects, and they ground themselves in duty to people during hard times.

On some level, these women from the 1800s felt that they belonged to a group. The word "woman" meant something. They would say "we do this because we are women"—Eliza Way Champlain obeyed her husband because she saw it as a necessary part of being a virtuous woman. Lucy Lane Allen took care of her ill mother because it was her duty as a daughter to do so. To them, being a woman meant working hard as a wife and mother, and continuing on in those duties regardless of comfort or convenience. Being a woman meant watching out for the people around them, and gathering together to help each other get necessary tasks done (such as quilting). Being a woman meant caring for people who were sick, especially those in their families. Being a woman meant sharing their experiences, and wanting connection enough to be willing to be vulnerable. These women valued connection with others, so much that they would take time from their busy schedules to drop a friend a line when someone they knew would be heading their way. They cared about how they presented themselves, at least partly to preserve the relationship they had with others.

The values of nineteenth-century women don't necessarily transfer directly to today—for example, few people today would argue that a woman must obey her husband unquestioningly in order to be considered virtuous. However, the same pattern—of identifying the folklore in correspondence and analyzing it with a folkloric lens—can be applied to find values embedded in women's correspondence today, including emails, tweets, or even blog posts. Such an analysis could give us not only a new way to look at these new media, but more importantly, a way to learn about what the writers value. But for now, it is enough to know that we can learn about women from the past by reading the lore they left behind, buried in their letters.

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Woman Selling Plantain Chips

This young woman helps support her family by selling dried plantain chips on the busy streets of Accra, the capital city in Ghana.

Brian Hoffman

Hands and Feet

Jessie Hawkes Wilkey

Except for the rogue bit of pondweed, skinny-dipping wasn't nearly as strange as I thought it would be. Of course, the darkness helped, as did my complete ease around Sparky, my closest friend and confidant while employed at Pondicherry girl's camp. I was uncomfortable only for a second as I shed my sweats, t-shirt, and sports bra, and hastily plunged into the water. I resurfaced with a gasp and a giggle, gazing across the lake to allow Sparky some privacy while she too shed her pajamas on the shore behind me. Treading water in the inky ripples, I breathed out a deep sigh. So this is what it felt like to be naked. Strange that it took seventeen years. I grinned with the adrenaline of freedom and reward; I was graceful, primal, a frizzy-haired blend of Laura Croft and the freshly birthed Venus. Even with the occasional slip of pond algae against my stomach, I felt lithe. Dipping my chin beneath the water, I sucked in a mouthful of pond water and sent it flying against the sky, a projectile, in a long, leisurely arc, like one of those tacky pastoral yard sculptures. It's a terrible and unsanitary habit, but I hadn't contracted giardia yet.

Behind me, Sparky laughed nervously and I heard her splash in with a slurping sound and a gasp of breath.

"You can look now," she breathed, and I sheepishly sank to my neck in the water before revolving slowly, our eyes avoiding each other's white underwater shadows. Why were we doing this?

Growing up on an island in Maine, I was highly familiar with artist communes and spiritual retreats, where bearded men or batik-wearing refugees from the 60s who had settled in the obsolete woods would gather and find their interior selves. My earliest memories of sleepovers with my friends involved hearing bongo drums, sleeping in a teepee, drinking homegrown tea, and falling asleep to my friend's mother strumming the guitar and talking about how to love everyone—even Ted, the strange man who lived down the street. Despite all that, I had retained a healthy skepticism about discovering my feminine spirit through drum circles and incense. Tonight, the touch of water on the unguarded white bank of my stomach

and back triggered a strange new sense of pride in my body. I examined my bizarre collage of warm brown and Day-Glo skin, strangely foreshortened by the dark lake, with only the occasional pedal of my own feet visible to me as I treaded water. I felt feminine, daring, and comfortable within this spongy machine. It was significant; my spirit tugged at me saying that something about this bizarre experience was important, even sacred, if I dared say it. I kicked farther out, along the glinting path the moon left between me and the kayaking docks. I was naked in a lake just weeks before starting college, and it was somehow metaphorical.

I have enjoyed several skinny dipping episodes subsequent to this one, but looking back on this first revealing experience, I admit that it was only the capstone moment of a pivotal summer of self-molding. The three summers previous to the summer of the skinny dip, I had worked at a Boy Scout camp, where the ratio of men to women on staff was approximately twenty to one and campers to women more than ninety to one. While I enjoyed the raucous freedom that Scout camp entertained with motorboats, kayak trips, and midnight Frisbee games (I demanded permanent membership on the "shirts," not "skins," team), I was aware of the dozens of pairs of prepubescent male eyes that seemed to peer at me from every table in the dining hall and every dock on the waterfront. I took to wearing shorts with my bathing suit as I instructed my classes. I was hasty to throw on a tank top or a towel over my swimming suit, so I could teach without constantly crossing my arms over my chest. I acted confidently, but did so despite my body, not because of it.

My spirit tugged at me saying that something about this bizarre experience was important, even sacred...

This changed at Pondicherry, my first all-girls camp, when I found myself as a single body amidst a small army of mostly international women. They were loud women, funny, brave: salsa-dancing Cubans, ax-toting Texans who swore in their tents with words no New England lexicon would document, willowy Koreans, Scottish women with incomprehensible accents. Pondicherry employed a cacophony of female bodies.

In fact, the typical discomfort that I felt with my general shape began to slowly fold during my time at the girls' camp. One afternoon, before going to dinner, I climbed onto the lip of the ceramic gray bathtub. It was one of those permanent ceramic ones with the rounded lip and metal-clawed feet. From my precarious position, I could see my waist and legs in the mirror that was perched on top of the sink across the room. Carefully balancing with a hand on the ceiling, I examined the back of my legs for the first time. They were a dark honey brown but met with a wall of white at the top of my thighs, as alarming as a bubble of fat on a piece of undercooked bacon. Despite the unglamorous coloration, the interesting silhouette of my calf muscle fascinated me, the one muscular quality my mother had passed on to me. I examined the muscles and veins that

intersected on the back of my legs, like the subtle features on a topographical map. *Look at this cool body!* I thought, feeling like a five-year-old.

That summer my body rowed, backstroked, and rescued with new assurance. All of these things it had done for years at scout camp behind a self-conscious veil became genuine acts of self-celebration, without pretense. The summers before, I had imagined my competency as an aquatics instructor being evaluated by how I looked doing aquatics. Now, surrounded by women, the task itself became the focus, and I was delighted to find I could swim, set up docks, dive, and run a waterfront without the intervention of an awkward body.

My body was useful for comforting as well, pulling girls close when they were afraid at night, rubbing their backs as they sat next to me on my cabin steps; this physicality was forbidden at boy's camp. It was a body for singing and giving grace at dinner, for learning to say "xiè xiè" to the Chinese cook, for juggling sleeves of Girl Scout cookies to entertain the masses while it rained. And now, lounging in the lake, I felt that I had a natural and artistic body, one that blended effortlessly with the mutter of the water and the creak of the trees lining the shore. It was not limited to being a sexual body (although I felt the comfortable tick of feminine sexuality in the ease of being bare under the stars); it was calm and stately, dark and pale, strong and soft, and irreducible and intensely complex, like the patters on the water reflecting the sky above.

I remember one of my first lessons on spirituality and the body as I embarked on my first discussion of modesty in my Young Women class at church. Growing up as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "modesty" was a catchall phrase that meant the way we dressed and spoke. Because of the very literal belief that one's body is a gift from God, modesty is a frequent staple of church discussions, especially for teenage girls. And while the word itself has many implications, it was often reduced in conversation to a matter of hemlines and midriffs.

Our teacher explained some of the practical instructions of modesty (even words like "low cut" and "bust line" made me blush) and then continued onto the "why" of modesty. I don't remember exactly what she said, but I am positive that she touched on making sure that we don't give the wrong impression about ourselves, distract young men in our congregation, or, perhaps most importantly, encourage them to have inappropriate thoughts.

Let me take this moment to interject and give you some insight into my appearance as a twelve year old. My favorite outfit at that time was a pair of white overalls with bad threading and a navy and white striped sweater from L.L.Bean. My sense of social graces hibernated somewhere with my fashion sense, which led me to a several-year long misunderstanding that "matching" was synonymous with "articles of clothing being the same color." My mother maintained a charitable laissez-faire policy with my fashion, only stopping me occasionally when I would

start out the door sporting wind pants, a t-shirt, and a sweater, each a different shade of plum. In addition to this fundamental misunderstanding of clothing, I also believed my hair to be straight. This was a more well grounded claim; up until fourth grade my hair was blonde and straight, but during my fifth grade year, as if overnight, it snuck into gnarly, coarse brown curls. I refused to accept the change. "Poufy" became a swear word in my home; to retaliate against the onslaught of volume I combed my wet hair back so tightly against my skull that I looked bald from the front. In the back, the ponytail exploded like a suppressed mane, swinging fully behind me as a sarcastic nod to my lack of success in the hair wrestling department. I completed the look with a pair of gold, wire rimmed glasses, colorful braces to subdue the beaver teeth, and a permanent malady of chapped lips. Needless to say, I was not a prime candidate for seduction.

I am ashamed to admit, that listening to the Sunday modesty discussion as a twelve-year-old perched on my plastic chair in my mismatched outfit, Vaseline smeared on my skin, and probably with Halloween orange and black elastics on my braces, I almost laughed.

Me? You don't want ME to give the young men bad thoughts? I ran the roster of my church's sixteen-year-old boys through my head: Rob, Scott, David, and Zach—all much older and eternally more attractive than I was or could ever hope to be. I gazed back, amused at my teacher. *It would be miraculous if the young men thought about me at ALL, much less had disracting thoughts about my body.* I agreed not to wear anything revealing (*revealing WHAT? I could have rightfully asked*), dismissed the lesson as generally "one for later," and continued unconcerned down the very same path of unfortunate, but incredibly modest, fashion.

Even my callused feet and wild hair...are part of my soul.

Since that time, I have had at least three dozen other lessons about modesty, including several when I was serving a mission for the Church and one last Sunday, from the president of the Church's women's organization, the Relief Society. I have come to love and appreciate these discussions as a woman, although I found them to be ironic and discouraging as a youth.

I have come to understand what my gawky twelve-year-old self missed and what my skinny-dipping self was only beginning to understand: a body is more than a structure to tent our spirits. I don't hold the classical Christian belief that the goal of mortality is to transcend the chains and inherent evils of the flesh. In fact, my church's doctrine teaches that the spirit and body compose the *soul*, together. Even my callused feet and wild hair, they are part of my soul. In these moments of physical self-acceptance, silly as standing on a bathtub or swimming in a lake, I face a fuller and more sensual facet of soul-ness.

This supports my strong notion that my soul has its origin with God. I believe

that I am a literal daughter of God. More accurately, I work to believe that I am a daughter of God. Despite risking cliché in my church for its frequent repetition, the concept can be hard to internalize. This imperfect and prone-to-be-sick body, my impatient and hotheaded self, from God? The principle requires all the repetition I can get.

The way I treat my body, then, is an indication of my respect for God, who is my Father, and for myself. Then, how do I feel about my body in conjunction with this notion? At age twenty-three, I find myself with a loose commitment to vegetarianism, a love of exercise, a prideful disdain for pencil skirts, and a sympathetic horror at the spiritually cutting grip of eating disorders. I didn't adopt any of these things as a conscious effort to respect God; they came as a natural progression of wanting to be happier and teaching myself to be satisfied with this body. Still, even growing up in a Mormon setting where I am taught that the body is a divine aspect of the soul, I am exasperated at my complete inability to snowboard, and I constantly tug at the seams of any bathing suit I wear. It is so easy to blame problems of personal failure on the body. I can only imagine the utter frustration if God was removed from the equation entirely.

In the lesson I was privy to this past Sunday, the Relief Society president mentioned that we should be modest even when we are alone in our homes. This echoed something pivotal to my concept of my modesty, that it is *not* for other people, but revolves around a personal understanding between the Lord and ourselves. It is *not* about "giving" bad thoughts to people. It is *not* about being attractive or unattractive. In fact, the very idea of attractiveness should be divorced from its association with modesty or immodesty. On the contrary, modesty has everything to do with who I am, understanding the gift I have, and desiring to take care of it appropriately. It is the difference between the way I treat my Volkswagen Jetta beater from high school and my roommate's SUV when I borrow it to drive to the store; when something of high quality is loaned to me, I drive more carefully, avoid feathering the gas pedal, and am much less likely to leave banana peels on the dashboard. If I can recognize who I am, where I come from, and to whom I belong, it should fundamentally change the way I act, speak, and dress.

One of the most glorious promises God gives us is that this is a rent-to-own contract: everyone who has a mortal body in this life will have a perfected one in the next. The hope for an eternal life with a perfected body comes as a relief to me; instead of just being a spirit wandering in some marshmallowy otherworld, I could go swimming! Eat ice cream! Roll in the leaves! This concept draws substance into the experiences I have now because my body isn't designed to just keep me from getting bored on earth while I try to perfect my spirit. Imagine: holding hands and eating ice cream in heaven too. The thought makes heaven that much more tantalizing.

Looking back, I used to be surprised by how often the resurrection was mentioned in the scriptures; it just didn't seem like a big deal that we would have bodies in

the next life because I couldn't imagine myself without one. It was the part I always forgot when our Sunday School teacher drew those seven circles that are universally familiar to any member of the Mormon church on the whiteboard and asked us to label the events of the Plan of Salvation. "The Plan" is a roadmap of pre-earth, earth, and post-earth experiences, and is just about as common as modesty on the itinerary of lessons one hears at my church. *Oh yeah, resurrection, that's right*, I'd think, squiggling a line before "Judgement." Since that time, I've come to recognize that resurrection doesn't seem to be just a lucky door prize of enduring life on earth; it is the crowning gift in conjunction with spiritual sanctification that the Savior Jesus Christ offers us. The main event of the next life.

During the eighteen months that I served as a missionary for the Church, I met people whose bodies, lives, and hopes were mangled. One single mother, who couldn't have been much older than I was, toted an oxygen tank through her oatmeal-colored apartment in her housing project, the creaky wheels following her like one of her own children. Another woman faced tragedy in the death of an infant granddaughter who had been hit by a car. Harry, who loved beagles and that 60's scream band Iron Butterfly, sat in a wheelchair with feet the size of small cantalopes. Some would look at us hungry for answers to their pain.

The resurrection day will not just be about having a body again, but it will be an explosion of recollection and reunion...

Over and over, I found myself drawn to speaking about themes of resurrection. From the Book of Mormon, I found accounts of men who watched their own nation gnaw itself into bloody ruin, who then had the clarity to write and hear God speaking to them.

And what it is that ye shall hope for? Behold I say unto you, that you shall have hope through the Atonement of Christ and the power of His resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal, and this because of your faith in Him, according to the promise (Moroni 7:41).

Other experiences with death close in: the passing of an aunt to cancer and a friend's mother's fatal accident. Only a month ago, my family faced the death of a cousin—an accidental overdose in an empty hotel room. Until then, I had never really seen death; I had just caught its aroma in someone else's family. Even with this most recent loss, I experienced death packaged with flowers, accompanied by sentiments expressed in pastel cards, surrounded by gripping hugs, and set off by classical music. It finds my family and I feeling meditative, speaking often of what my cousin will be in the 'next life.' We cling to a hope of a world without mental illness and addiction, with clear vision, and with more direct access to the soul through a perfect body.

Lounging in a lake or contemplating the painfully polished shine of a casket are celebrations of the same song, a song the world remembers only through the cerebral curtain of innate memory. Our spirit-hearts and soul-hearts reside in the same cavity, stitching themselves onto one another with recognition of the self, of the soul, of the transcendent *yes* that is summer mornings and the aching leg muscles and the tickle of sweat on the lips. In that conviction, I stand that the resurrection day will not just be about having a body again, but it will be an explosion of recollection and reunion, a shout, a soar, a golden leap, a thousand hugs, and wet—gloriously wet—tears, fist pumps, deep kisses, handsprings, and finally, not a single self-conscious girl.

Woman Working at Quarry

This woman works hard breaking rocks at the Assin Foso quarry behind her small town.

Brian Hoffman

Women in Refrigerators:
The Objectification of Women in Comics

Kyra Nelson

In *Green Lantern* issue 54, Kyle Rayner, a new addition to the Green Lantern corps, walks into his apartment. On the table he finds a note saying a surprise awaits him in the refrigerator. Kyle makes his way into the kitchen and to his horror discovers the body of his strangled girlfriend, Alex, stuffed into the refrigerator. Alex, who only made it through five issues of the series, suffers a fate similar to those of many other women in comics. Frequently, comic book writers employ female characters as little more than plot devices designed to provide emotional drama and backstory for their male counterparts.

Women Portrayed in Comics

The treatment of women in comics has been discussed for many years. From Frederic Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* in 1953 to the Women in Refrigerators movement started by Gail Simone in 1999, readers of comic books have analyzed various ways in which females are portrayed. Discussions on the objectification of women consist of two important aspects. First is the overtly sexual portrayal of women in regard to their impossible bodies and revealing costumes. The second focuses more generally on how comics show women as inferior characters who are more likely to be killed or lose their powers.

Superhero comics have traditionally targeted a male audience, which writers and artists have learned to cater to. One of the first women to make it big in the comic book industry was not a superheroine, but rather a voluptuous queen of the jungle named Sheena (Madrid 31). Sheena oozed sexuality, running around with her mate while wearing her leopard skin bikini. Other women of the early comic book era were similarly sexualized. In 1941 the world of masked crime fighters saw the rise of Phantom Lady, a pin-up girl whose costume progressively showed more and more skin. In Figure 1, Phantom Lady proudly shows off her famous cleavage. These types of sensuous women drew criticism in Wertham's book *Seduction of the Innocent*, which resulted in the formation of the Comics Code

Authority, a regulatory agency that would put a stamp of approval on comic books appropriate for young boys to read (Madrid 49).

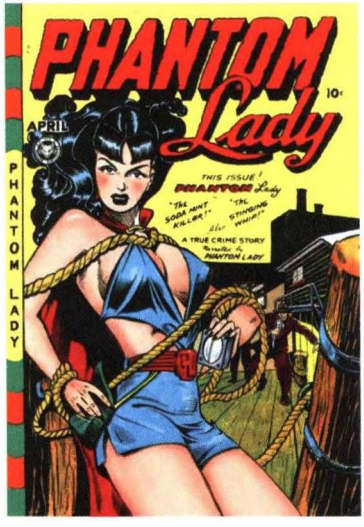

Fig 1. The cover of Phantom Lady from Baker, Matt. "Phantom Lady #17." *Phantom Lady*. 17 Vol. Fox Feature Syndicate, 1948. Cover. Print.

With the Comics Code Authority in place, both Sheena and Phantom Lady disappeared from the pages of comics, unable to sell books when they were wearing more clothes. Those females who did survive the new regulations were much less sexual in nature. So it might seem that for a time women were relieved from their role as sexual sirens. But these more conservative times only provided new obstacles for the women of comics.

While Sheena, Phantom Lady, and the other early women of the comics were scantily clad, impossibly proportioned, and overly sexualized, the more demure women of the post–World War II era generally did little more than fall into the damsel-in-distress role. Sheena and Phantom Lady were fierce and could hold their own. The same could not be said for their successors. These more conservative times saw the introduction of characters such as Batwoman and Lois Lane. Batwoman was designed as a romantic interest for Batman—created to refute allegations of homosexuality between the Caped Crusader and his sidekick Robin (Madrid 55). Lois Lane was a feisty reporter in love with Superman. The main ambition of both women was to marry their respective caped loves. Their attempts to do so usually landed them in bad situations, which their beaus then had to remedy. Lois Lane's misadventures, for instance, included being turned into a centaur, growing an oversized brain, and almost accidentally marrying the devil. Superman was always there to save her, though, just as Batman was always around to rescue Batwoman from the trouble she found by insisting on following him in his adventures.

Although Batwoman and Lois Lane were not objectified by unrealistic proportions and low-cut outfits, they were objectified by their extreme need to be married and their seeming incompetence to do much else. As comics have moved forward through the decades, they have continued to struggle in portraying females who are neither over-idealized nor helpless victims. Although female heroines have varied between the two extremes, there is almost always room for improvement.

Women in Comics in the '90s

The Comics Code Authority eventually lost power, and women in comics became increasingly sexualized. The '90s was a particularly notable decade in comics for impossible body proportions with very few clothes to hide them. Marvel published a swimsuit issue where busty heroines lounged around a pool in bikinis. Characters such as Lady Death (shown in Figure 2) wore barely-there outfits that left nothing to the imagination. Furthermore, these characters featured impossibly large breasts and toothpick torsos (Madrid 271). These women were so impossibly proportioned that, had they been real, they would have tipped over if they had tried to stand up. Although the proportions of women in comics are not quite so absurd in recent years, they are still highly idealized forms. Among the ranks of the superheroines, there is not a Plain Jane to be found.

These women were so impossibly proportioned that, had they been real, they would have tipped over if they had tried to stand up.

Fig 2. Lady Death from Pulido, Brian, and Steven Hughes. "Lady Death: Hell's Harrowing." *Lady Death*. 4 (1995): Cover. Print.

Furthermore, women have not completely escaped the fate of being portrayed as inferior characters. Sue Storm, also known as the Invisible Woman, provides a good example of this. The only woman on a team of men, she concerned herself more with trying to win Mr. Fantastic's heart than with saving the world. She often played the role of damsel in distress. The team's first book in 1961 shows Sue caught in the clutches of a monster, exclaiming, "I can't turn invisible fast enough! How can we stop this creature, Torch?" (Lee). Meanwhile, her male teammates assure her that they are more than a match for the creature. This sort of portrayal was typical for many of her early years in comics. Sue later suffered from the overly sexual portrayals of the 1990s when she ditched her old jumpsuit and instead went with a swimwear-type suit with a cutout for the stomach and the team logo cut out in such a manner as to emphasize her cleavage.

Even when women in comics became more powerful, they were still inferior characters. In the rare cases that their powers matched their male counterparts, they were less important, as evidenced by their apparent disposability. Comic book writer Gail Simone pointed this out in her 1999 Women in Refrigerators campaign, so named in remembrance of the fate suffered by Alex DeWitt. Simone recounts that she began the Women in Refrigerators list, described at the beginning of this paper, by jotting down female characters that had suffered unfortunate fates, when she realized, "It was actually harder to list major female characters who *hadn't* been sliced up somehow" (Simone). This difference in portrayal plays a critical role in determining the effect of comic book females on women's body image.

Sometimes the effects of weaker portrayal and overt sexuality are combined in a morbid sort of way. Stephanie Brown makes a wonderful case study of this phenomenon. Stephanie began her superheroine career as the masked vigilante Spoiler. Later she teamed up with Batman as the latest incarnation of Batgirl. She then took up the mantle of Robin, the only female to ever do so. Stephanie's turn as Robin was short-lived, however, when she faced a brutal murder at the hands of the villainous Black Mask. After hours of being tortured with a power drill in the comic, Stephanie finally died. In Figure 3 we see that she is not only the victim of a gruesome murder, but also has the indignity of being drawn in a sexually suggestive pose after being killed. Stephanie's fans were further outraged when the heroine did not receive a memorial in the Batcave the way Jason Todd, the deceased second Robin, did (Borsellino). Later writers even tried to downplay her role, stating that Batman had never really thought of her as a real Robin.

Fig 3. Stephanie Brown, the first female Robin, depicted in a sexually suggestive pose after her death from Borsellino, Mary. "Project Girl Wonder." *Project Girl Wonder*. N.p., n.d, n. pag. Web. 14 Nov. 2012. < http://girl-wonder.org/robin/catwoman35.jpg>.

Parasocial Relationships

One may question if females are really treated unjustly compared to men. It is certainly true that male characters are also drawn with very idealized bodies, covered in rippling muscles. To that extent it is fair to say that men are also objectified in comics. However, women in the comic book world suffer from other disadvantages. When it comes to the fates suffered by men and women, according to Simone, "If there are only 50 major female superheroes, and 40 of them get killed/maimed/depowered, then that's more significant numerically than if 40 male characters get killed, since there are many times more of them total" (Simone). Essentially, Simone points out that there still is a proportionally larger group of abused women in comics than men. She then continues, "The male characters seem to die nobly, as heroes [but] shock value seems to be a major motivator in the superchick deaths more often than not." Stephanie Brown's death certainly fits the description of a shock-value death, as does Alex DeWitt's. There are others who have suffered shock-value deaths in comics, such as Dee Tyler, whose impaled body was hung on the Washington monument, or Pantha, who was punched in the face so hard that she was decapitated.

Women in comics... are often portrayed as...weak, ditzy, and disposable.

A recent study shows that men often form parasocial relationships with superheroes, meaning that they strongly relate to the characters they read about (Young). When this happens, the negative effects of being exposed to an idealized body type are moderated. The male superheroes portrayed in comics are noble, powerful, and heroic. Because of this, men are likely to relate to these characters and form parasocial relationships, which in turn prevent the idealized forms from harming men's body images (Young). Women in comics, however, are often

portrayed as so weak, ditzy, and disposable that it is hard to form parasocial relationships with them. Therefore, women are more likely to be negatively affected by the idealized female body images portrayed in comics.

Comics, Media, and Health

The negative effects media has on body image are well documented, as are the health risks associated with body dissatisfaction. One monumental study of the effects of media on body image is Becker's study of Fijian girls before and after prolonged exposure to television. Fiji was chosen as a study site because by the mid-1990s only one case of anorexia had been reported (Becker 538). Over the course of the study, however, as media exposure increased, Becker's group saw a substantial increase in the number of eating disorders (Becker 533). Other studies suggest that eating disorders are becoming ever more prevalent and are starting at younger ages, even as young as eight or nine years of age and that 40 percent of nine-year-olds have been on a diet (Derenne). Derenne says, "With media pressure to be thin and a multibillion dollar dieting industry at our disposal, higher rates of eating disorders in the population seem concerning, but are also understandable. While cultural standards of beauty are certainly not new, today's media is far more ubiquitous and powerful." What this means is that American women are more pressured than ever to be thin as a result of media portrayals of idealized women's bodies.

More women are writing comics now than in the past, and women often are more balanced in their portrayal of women as well as more interested in creating powerful women.

It may also be important to note that perceptions of the ideal body do change, and the changes are reflected in media (Harrison 40). The more dramatic changes in media portrayals then lead to increased body dissatisfaction when the ideal is harder to achieve. Thus the greatest numbers of eating disorders were recorded in the time periods that perceived the ideal female body as being the thinnest (40).

Although media is widely focused on as a negative influence on body image, few studies have centered specifically on exposure to comic books. However, it is reasonable to assume that impossible body types in comic books are no less harmful than impossible body types in other forms of media. Women in comics overwhelmingly have impossible body proportions, drawn to cater to a predominantly male audience. For this reason women are drawn to be sexually attractive and are portrayed as side characters supporting male heroes. Rather than being a result of predominant male readership, however, this could actually cause a predominantly male readership. As Simone points out, "If you demolish most of the characters girls like, then girls won't read comics" (Simone). Meanwhile,

the smaller portion of girls who do read comics are exposed to women with unrealistic bodies and personalities that prevent easy formation of parasocial relationships, an exposure which could, as we've seen, lead to negative self-image. Girls may find themselves avoiding comics as a result of these negative experiences.

The Future for Women in Comics

In the comics of the '90s, breasts became bigger and waists became longer until the overall effect was more freaky than sexy (Madrid 273). However, the future offers hope for the superheroine. Since the '90s, idealized bodies have relaxed to some extent. More importantly, comics seem to be improving in their ability to portray powerful, relatable women. Many of the women on Simone's original Women in Refrigerators list have been resurrected and restored to their original powers.

More women are writing comics now than in the past, and women often are more balanced in their portrayal of women as well as more interested in creating powerful women. Simone is a notable example of this for her work on the *Birds of Prey* comic book line. *Birds of Prey* is a DC Comics publication which portrays an all-female team featuring Oracle, Black Canary, Huntress, and Lady Blackhawk. Compare this to the *Spiderman Loves Mary Jane* series Marvel intended to cater to female readership. While *Spiderman Loves Mary Jane* attempts to depict a dramatic teenage love triangle as written by two adult men, *Birds of Prey* presents strong women overcoming difficult personal challenges while defending their city. It's not hard to see why *Birds of Prey* is still in print, while *Spiderman Loves Mary Jane* ran only briefly.

Furthermore, with the recent spate of silver-screen adaptations of comic book characters, superheroes have become increasingly more mainstream and accessible to the general public. This offers the comic book industry an opportunity to gain new readership, and especially to gain new female readership. One character from the movies who shows the potential for female superheroes is Marvel's Black Widow as portrayed in *Iron Man 2* and *The Avengers*. Black Widow only plays a brief role in *Iron Man 2*, but even there manages to make an impression after being featured in a scene where she takes down a hallway full of armed assailants. Her role in *The Avengers* only improves on this image as she is depicted not only with impressive martial arts skills but also as capable of mentally competing with her opponents. This is best depicted in scenes where she pretends to be interrogated by her enemies while managing to elicit the information she wants from them. Black Widow has shown what superheroines can be, and hopefully her success will lead to more strong female characters both in movies and in comics.

Comic books have distinctive traits. Many of the characters were created in times very different from our own. Characters such as Superman, Batman, and Captain

America have been around for sixty or seventy years. Characters' story lines will continue for many years, and characters are often written by many different writers. Because of this, characters are frequently revamped or portrayed in different ways based on whoever is writing them. Events are retconned out of continuity, and origin stories are updated to fit more modern times. One writer may kill off characters that he or she is not fond of, and a few years later a writer who liked the characters can bring them back from the dead. Because of this unique nature of the medium, comic books offer opportunities for characters to be improved, making the possibility of strong superheroines arising from formerly weak superheroines a very real one.

In 1988 Barbara Gordon, the original Batgirl, was shot by the Joker and paralyzed from the waist down in the comic. Although she nobly continued her involvement in crime fighting by becoming the information broker Oracle, fans bemoaned the loss of the Batgirl who flew across rooftops. For over twenty years Barbara fought from the confinement of a wheelchair. Then, with the relaunch of DC Comics' entire franchise, Barbara finally regained the use of her legs. Not only that, but Batgirl once again found herself starring in her own line of comic books. The series has done well, and offers more evidence that women do have their place in comics. With luck, more women in comics will follow in Barbara's footsteps, shaking off the dust of all the things that have held them back and rising up to a new era of comics: the era of the superheroine.

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Civil Marriage

This group of women make up the Assin Foso Relief Society of the LDS church. They are supporting their sister who has just been civilly married.

Brian Hoffman

Contributors

Alexandra Crafton graduated from BYU in December 2012 with a B.A. in English. In addition to studying English literature and internet publishing, she took several courses in art and photography.

Jennifer L. Duqué studied English and Women's Studies at BYU from 2011-2014. She wrote "We Know How to Keep House and We Know How to Keep a City" in 2012, and presented it in the BYU Women's Studies Conference later that year. She was recently accepted to UC Berkeley's Ph.D. program in Ethnic Studies, which she plans to begin this fall.

Brian Hoffmann was born in Albany, New York in 1990. He graduated from Brigham Young University in August, 2014 with a B.A. in Studio Arts. He currently lives in Orem, Utah with his wife Becca and works for a Non-Profit Organization that cares for men with developmental disabilities.

Danielle Chelom Leavitt grew up in Utah and Ukraine. She studies Russian and Women's Studies at Brigham Young University. The time in Ukraine profoundly influences her interests, and her writing revolves primarily around rural women and women in post-war or countries experiencing conflict. Danielle has been published in Scholastic's The Best Teen Writing of 2010, The Deseret News, and Inscape and has read her essays at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research and the Utah Conference for Undergraduate Research. She is grateful to her parents, her Ukrainian babushky, and all the women at Amahoro ava Hejuru (Rwanda) for their examples.

Rachel Mahrt Degn loves hiking, learning through research and experience, trying to see issues from different perspectives, seeking light and truth, and spending time with her husband and other family members. Rachel graduated from BYU with a degree in English, with minors in Spanish and editing. She lives with her husband in Mapleton, Utah.

Kimberly Merkley graduated from BYU in April 2013 and then moved to Chicago with her husband, where she spent a year teaching computer classes for refugees and immigrants. After a summer-long internship helping a non-profit organization with refugee job placement, Kimberly accepted a job at an economics lab and another in childcare. She is expecting her first baby, a boy, as this issue goes to press.

Jenna Miller graduated with a BA in English from BYU and now lives in Dallas, teaching logic classes to help students prepare to take the LSAT. She loves literature for the way it helps her question her paradigms and widen her worldview.

Kyra Nelson is a Linguistics MA student from Billings, Montana. Kyra's research interests include young adult literature, construction of linguistic corpora, vocabulary acquisition, and publishing. She does not have any (known) superpowers.

Katie Wade-Neser has had poetry and short fiction published in Inscape, Literature and Belief, and The Grid. She completed her MFA at Brigham Young University and currently teaches composition at the University of Nevada Las Vegas.

Natalie K. Soper is the artist for this issue's cover. She is mostly from Utah, and mostly makes paintings. She mostly spends her free time dancing and playing music. And skiing in the mountains. Mostly she is excited to get her Masters degree so she can go teach at a college and talk to most people all day about mostly interesting things.

Jessie Hawkes Wilkey graduated from BYU's English department in 2014. Her work has been featured in the David O. McKay essay collection, the BYU Humanities magazine, the *New Era*, the *Ensign*, and *Do Not Attempt in Heels*, a collection of essays from sister missionaries. She enjoys writing poetry and essays, hiking, biking, climbing, and reading.

Artist's Notes

Alexandra Crafton's "The Complexity of Things Becomes More Close" is a series of silver gelatin prints exploring woman finding her womanhood as inspired by Virginia Woolf. She took these photos with film that she personally developed and printed in the darkroom.

Brian Hoffman's photos of the beautiful women of Ghana are outstanding examples of strength, empowerment and positive work ethic. Though many of those women have received minimal formal education, they tirelessly care for and provide for their families. These women are positive influences, uniting home and community.