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# Masculine Space: The Final Frontier; A Historical Analysis of the Spatial Politics of Gender through the New Woman's Access to Brassieres, Bicycles, and Higher Education in the United States from 1890-1930

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*Masculine Space: The Final Frontier*

A Historical Analysis of the Spatial Politics of Gender through the New Woman's Access  
to Brassieres, Bicycles, and Higher Education in the United States from 1890-1930

by

Shelby Kirst Goldman

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of  
Requirements of the Senior Independent Study

Supervised by  
Katherine Holt  
Department of History

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## Abstract

1890-1930 was a time of major social and cultural shifts as the Victorian conventions clashed with progressive and changing ideas of gender, race, and class, resulting in the liberated American New Woman. This thesis examines the transition of the opportunities for increased physical movement for women allotted by the popularization of the brassiere, bicycle, and access to higher education. Examining the brassiere and bicycles' impact on women's liberation lends insight into how the physical placement and movement of female bodies confronted gender norms, while expansion of women's education made women intellectual threats to the patriarchal structure. My analysis of advertisements for corsets, brassieres, bicycles, and education courses in *Ladies' Home Journal* from 1890-1920 lets me consider how and why the social construction of gender roles changed. I also examine medical texts written by both men and women about women's bodies, along with personal accounts in memoirs, course catalogues, and forms of popular media in order to deduct what the popular perception of corsets, brassieres, bicycles, and women's higher education were over time, and to trace this shift in terms of women's movement from the private to public sphere of influence. Ultimately, anxiety around women's bodies moving into the public and historically masculine sphere confronted socially and historically constructed expectations of gender, gendered movement, and ownership of space.



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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

When famed temperance leader Frances Willard first learned how to ride a bicycle in 1892 at the age of 53, she recalled, “I began to feel that myself plus the bicycle equaled myself plus the world, upon whose spinning-wheel we must all learn to ride, or fall into the sluiceways of oblivion and despair.”<sup>1</sup> Willard understood the bicycle as a metaphor for life: a woman riding a bicycle felt the necessity of mental clarity, the benefits of hard, honest work, and the sweet outcomes of determination. Willard’s writings and activism, however, had profound implications for the status of women because she advocated for self-discipline through temperance and increased agency for women. With the bicycle as her steed, the whole world around her suddenly bloomed with opportunities of possible paths to ride on. Willard and women like her finally had access to autonomous movement.

From 1890-1930, societal shifts and advances in technology forced the United States and other Western nations to confront the changing status of women. As industrialization altered the structure of the family unit by moving the workplace from the home to the factory, women’s roles as workers, mothers, and wives changed and became more complex. This shift erupted in a frenzy of anxiety about gender performance. The “Woman Question” addressed this time of rapid societal and cultural change and asked what was the place and role of women in this turbulent time of the changing form of the home, new technologies, wealth, and leisure time. This question

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<sup>1</sup> Frances Willard. *A Wheel Within a Wheel; A Woman’s Quest for Freedom with Some Reflections by the Way*. Bedford, Massachusetts: Applewood Books, 1895, 27.

prompted a massive societal rift. This debate about proper gender performance in a time of strident binaries accelerated as more women stepped into public space.

However, the “New Woman” - as these women called themselves- fought against this rigid, traditional perception of women’s roles that limited their options to the domestic sphere.<sup>2</sup> Willard, and women like her, saw gender as a social construct rather than a biological compulsion.<sup>3</sup> Since she had the awareness that her biological sex did not directly tie her to the domestic and feminine sphere, she looked for new opportunities to leave that sphere and venture out into historically masculine spaces. This is where Frances Willard’s quote is especially applicable. With this new awareness and new experiences and technologies awaiting them, women for the first time during 1890-1930, could live financially independent of men.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, women took advantage of new technologies to increase reinforce their autonomy within their ascribed, gendered spaces. The corset, long restricting women’s bodily movements and abilities, met competition in the early twentieth century when women discovered the comfort and flexibility of the brassiere. Doctors and women alike promoted the healthful benefits of eliminating corsets, while those opposed to the brassiere mourned the end of the fashionable S curve and restricted movement of women’s bodies. The popularity and wide accessibility of the bicycle helped take brassiere-wearing women a step further. On their bicycles,

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<sup>2</sup>The Oxford English Dictionary defines the New Woman as: A woman who is considered different from previous generations; esp. one who challenges or rejects the traditional roles of wife, mother, or homemaker, and advocates independence for women and equality with men.

<sup>3</sup> Martha H. Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited; A Reader, 1894-1930*. New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2008. xi.  
For more information, see Chapter III where I discuss Victorian and New Woman philosophies on higher education.

women went for rides outside the home, often unchaperoned, and made independent choices which dictated their own movements. Once women were away from the corset and in their brassieres, riding bicycles with their friends without supervision, they could physically move their bodies into traditionally masculine space.<sup>4</sup> As women moved into masculine space, such as academia, not only did they pose a physical challenge to Victorian, patriarchal hierarchy, but an intellectual one as well.

I argue that the advent of the brassiere, bicycle, and access to education allowed the New Woman's liberation from Victorian conventions. With the potential opportunities available through the use of the brassiere, bicycle, and higher education she could move into historically masculine spaces and confront anxieties about gender performance, thus revealing the Victorian fear of the female body, mind, and the threat they posed together.<sup>5</sup> An educated and physically liberated woman on a bicycle could move through masculine, public space decisively and question socially constructed rules governing behavior, such as courting practices, marriage, and entering the workforce. These New Women thus posed a danger for male-dominated control of the public space. Armed with their brassieres, bicycles, and college degrees, women's voices demanded respect as knowledgeable and political bodies.

I examine this era in order to trace this shift in gender performance from that of the Victorian lady to the New Woman to see why Victorians were anxious about gender

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<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, "masculine space" refers to socially and historically constructed public space, informed by masculine authority. The Victorian separate spheres allotted men the public sphere and women the domestic sphere. Thus, male authority shaped politics and economics, while women had limited to no power in that same space.

<sup>5</sup> Gender, as referred to often throughout this thesis, is the performance on the spectrum of masculine and feminine cultural traits, is not necessarily aligned with biological sex, and is historically and socially constructed. Victorian gender performance depended on a strict binary of the overtly masculine and overtly feminine, while the New Woman challenged this construct by adopting typically masculine characteristics, thus blurring the gender lines.

deviance, and what this fear reveals about the greater American society from 1890-1930. Scholars have often sought to explore this disconnect in perceptions of women and their role in society in one of two ways: a discussion of how and when the Victorian philosophy of separate spheres evolved and affected women's lives, or through the perspectives and activities of the American New Women. Scholars Michael Mason, Joan N. Burstyn, and Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz are instrumental when conceptualizing the cultural extension of Victorian conventions. They examine American and British culture in the nineteenth century, how Victorian conventions began, and their implications for women's roles.<sup>6</sup> Their research emphasizes the necessity of the gender binary to perpetuate Victorian conventions and the lack of autonomy for women through self-policing and Victorian morality.

In their analysis of the New Woman, many scholars and historians draw from advice literature and publications to see how these forms of media portrayed her as a character. In her reader *The American New Woman Revisited*, Dr. Martha H. Patterson explores how this discussion of a woman's role played out in media outlets, in either newspapers, cartoons, magazines, or popular essays.<sup>7</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English examine advice literature written by medical and scientific authorities in order to analyze how this knowledge is reflected in positions of power. Their chapter, "In the Ruins of Patriarchy," is especially relevant to this concept of the Woman Question and how many took to science to use biological differences of sex to justify gender

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<sup>6</sup> Joan N. Burstyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*. New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books, 1980; Mason, Michael. *The Making of Victorian Sexual Attitudes*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994; Lefkowitz Horowitz, Helen. *Attitudes toward Sex in Antebellum America: A Brief History with Documents*. New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Patterson. *The American New Woman Revisited; A Reader, 1894-1930*. 2008.

inequality.<sup>8</sup> In *Divided Lives*, Rosalind Rosenberg discusses the fluctuation in women's roles in the private and public domains at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> Joshua Zeitz, in his book *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and the Women Who Made America Modern*, uses the Flapper character as a way to access changing ideas of sexuality and gender during the 1920s.<sup>10</sup> Zeitz argues that the Flapper was not just a character of the 1920s, but an international woman who changed the perception of women and blurred the boundary between the masculine and feminine. In my research, I utilize Zeitz's Part I and Part II which discuss who the Flapper was and how she influenced the United States.

For this research, I have chosen to focus on the period from 1890 through 1930. The French called the last decade of the nineteenth century the *Fin-de-siècle*, which roughly translates to the "end of an era." This perception about the end of a familiar era rang true for many Western nations, including the United States. Many aspects of society were in flux at this time, and Victorians feared that morality was on a downward spiral, striking fear into their hearts. Examining gender in this time is especially fascinating because of the idea of the "Woman Question." What do we do with the women? As culture of the household shifted during the mid-nineteenth century, families needed to confront anxiety of what women's roles should be. Victorian conventions clashed with modernity in the form of gray, smog-inducing factories of industrialization. With new technology came new customs for dress, socialization, and education. These new

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<sup>8</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English. *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts' Advice to Women*. Second. New York: Anchor Books, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Rosalind Rosenberg. *Divided Lives; American Women in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1992.

<sup>10</sup> Joshua Zeitz. *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and the Women Who Made America Modern*. Kindle. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006.

customs brought the role of women into question. Beginning in the 1890s, leisure, work opportunities, more access to education changed how society placed middle class women in the home as the protector of the nation's morality. Congress ratified the Nineteenth Amendment, giving women the right to vote in 1920, which signified a quantifiable range of success for women in public space. While the majority of my research comes from 1890-1930, the 1920s serve as comparison to the sexual and gender politics of the 1890s, and illustrate the implications of changing social codes.

The Victorian age began in Great Britain during the rule of Queen Victoria (1837-1901); however, historians commonly apply this term to talk about mid to late nineteenth century in the United States as well because of the similar economic and social changes industrialization caused to family life and notions of appropriate behavior in both countries. Many of the writers of the primary sources analyzed in this chapter were also British and French, illustrating the transatlantic circulation of ideas. Before industrialization, economic activity often occurred within the household and all family members had a role in the process. However, once industrialization began, business moved away from the home to separate, predominantly-male spaces. The idea of "separate spheres" appropriate to men and women evolved from this time as a way to address this shift in economic activity, and women's new roles. Separate spheres ideology states that men and women inhabit different roles to correspond to their biological sex. Additionally, for the first time, working and middle class families had leisure time and additional income. They often moved into the cities in the midst of industrialization, leaving the quiet of rural life. This change increased men's exposure to Victorian social ills such as prostitution and pornography. Middle class anxieties about

the “immorality” of urban life prompted Victorian sexual repression and modesty. Women, believed to be innately moral, motherly, and sensitive, acted as the peaceful keeper of the sanctity of the home, while men went to work in the gritty real world. These two places and actors were to never intermingle outside of their ascribed place.<sup>11</sup>

Victorian legislators passed restrictions intended to combat explicit sexuality. The Comstock Law of 1873 reflected this social anxiety of sex because it outlawed any written discussion of the body. Judges could issue warrants for search and seizure even for the sale of medically-based literature about sex education, contraceptive guidance, and pornography.<sup>12</sup> This law illustrates the codification of sexual repression and the anxiety surrounding the body, as well as how men and women needed to navigate the world around them properly, lest they fall to temptation.

If the Comstock Law of 1873 reflects Victorian anxiety about performance of gender and sexuality, the New Woman challenged that notion by physically entering these masculine spaces and conducting herself in ways not socially accepted, whether by wearing bloomers and brassieres, which changed her form and made her more androgynous, or by riding a bicycle which threatened her sexual purity. The New Woman also questioned the compulsion to marry, which was largely based in economic and social forces.<sup>13</sup> For women, marriage was the only socially acceptable outlet for women’s sexuality. As the New Woman questioned this socially and historically constructed institution, she challenged the lack of women’s autonomy within Victorian

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<sup>11</sup> Martha H. Patterson. *The American New Woman Revisited; A Reader, 1894-1930*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2008, xi.

<sup>12</sup> In 1873, Congress passed the federal bill: "Suppression of Trade in, and Circulation of, Obscene Literature and Articles of Immoral Use" which "made it illegal and punishable by either fines or imprisonment or both to send through the mail a wide range of sexually explicit materials, including contraceptive information and advertisements for abortion." Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz. *Attitudes toward Sex in Antebellum America: A Brief History with Documents*. New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2006, 30.

<sup>13</sup> Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited*, xi.

conventions, which were more concerned with the economic exchange of marriage between a father and husband rather than the woman's choice.

In the minds of Victorians, supposedly effeminate men and masculine women created anxiety linked to a fear of degeneracy and stagnancy.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, historian Joan Burstyn writes that societal refinement and prudery could also be attributed to the expanding cities; with more people interacting, self-policing made life more bearable and clean for everyone. However, she also writes in this separation of spheres, middle-class women lost power to men in the mid-nineteenth century because increased monopolization of wealth and interaction in the community gave men more political power and social capital, while women mainly dominated the private sphere.<sup>15</sup> The writings of Frederic Harrison were typical of this attitude. In his 1900 translation of *The Positivist Library of Auguste Comte*, Harrison wrote:

Home is clearly Woman's intended place; and the duties which belong to Home are Woman's peculiar province... And it is in the sweet sanctities of domestic life,-- in home duties,-- in whatever belongs to and makes the happiness of Home, that Woman is taught by the SPIRIT to find scope for her activity, -- to recognize her sphere of most appropriate service.<sup>16</sup>

As a response to modernization, Harrison circulated this translation because he believed that women were meant to keep the home sweet, safe, and good and her desire to do this, according to the staunch defenders of separate spheres, was rooted in biology and divine purpose. This Victorian notion was not without dissenting voices; many women and men discussed the evolving role of women at the beginning of the century.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>15</sup> Joan N. Burstyn. *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*. New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books, 1980, 19-20.

<sup>16</sup> Harrison, as transcribed in Burstyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*, 32. Emphasis from the original text.



This debate over the legitimacy of the New Woman famously began in the *North American Review* in 1894 between two female British writers, Sarah Grand and Ouida. While both of these women wrote full-time under pen names, they addressed separate camps of thought on women's liberation. Grand, a British feminist and New Woman herself, wrote extensively on unhappy marriages and women's suffrage. She also participated actively in promoting rational dress, lecturing on women's issues, and lobbying for the vote.<sup>17</sup> In her essay "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," she first coined the term "New Woman" for this increased awareness for nuance in the Woman Question.<sup>18</sup> She describes the position of the New Woman as men ask "If women don't want to be men, what do they want?"<sup>19</sup> The new woman, Grand writes, discovered the solution for "what was wrong with Home-is-the-Woman's-Sphere."<sup>20</sup> Here, she directly confronts Victorian notion of separate spheres between the sexes. She calls upon women as wives and mothers of future men to raise them to critically think about the social structures which diminish women:

True womanliness is not in danger, and the sacred duties of wife and mother will be all the more honorably performed when women have a reasonable hope of becoming wives and mothers of men. But there is difficulty. The trouble is not because women are mannish, but because men grow ever more effeminate. Manliness is at a premium now because there is so little of it, and we are accused of aping men in order to conceal the side from which the contrast should evidently be drawn.<sup>21</sup>

Here Grand plays on the tension between socially constructed "manliness" and "womanliness." She argues that true men do not push women down beneath them, and

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<sup>17</sup>Martha H. Patterson. *The American New Woman Revisited; A Reader, 1894-1930*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2008, 29.

<sup>18</sup> Originally published in: Sarah Grand, "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," *North American Review*, March 1894, 270-276. Accessed in: Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited*, 29- 34.

<sup>19</sup> Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited*, 30.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited*, 33.

therefore those men lack morality. Grand pushes her readers to consider the social structure around them. She deconstructs the world she lives in to show how the gender dichotomy creates a disparity in power between men and women.

Ouida critiqued Sarah Grand's vision of the New Woman.<sup>22</sup> She informs her readers that Grand said that the New Woman had an answer, but never actually spelled it out. Ouida believed that the New Woman was overreacting and overzealous about this need for more rights. She writes, "Woman, whether new or old, has immense fields of culture untilled, immense areas of influence wholly neglected. She does almost nothing with the resources she possesses, because her whole energy is concentrated on desiring and demanding those she has not."<sup>23</sup> For Ouida, the New Woman is unreasonably blinded by irrelevant details. If the New Woman wants to be more like a man, she loses originality and purpose. On the New Woman's ultimate flaw, Ouida writes:

The error of the New Woman (as of many an old one) lies in speaking of women as the victims of men, and entirely ignoring the frequency with which men are the victims of women. In nine cases out of ten the first to corrupt youth is the woman. In nine cases out of ten also she becomes corrupt herself because she likes it.

Ouida disagrees with the New Woman's emphasis on men's wrongdoing in the subjugation of women. Throughout her essay, she says that women are no better than men, and would be even more inferior in a sphere which is unnatural to them. For this reason, she advocates against Grand and disagrees about the importance of this answer, or lack thereof, to the Woman Question.

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<sup>22</sup> Ouida, given name was Marie Louise de La Ramee, wrote extensively and lived flamboyantly. She wrote many articles and essays expressing her skepticism of the New Woman, women's suffrage, animal cruelty, the British book trade and imperialism. Ouida, "The New Woman" (May 1894) in *The American New Woman Revisited*, ed. Martha Patterson (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 35-42.

<sup>23</sup> Ouida, "The New Woman," in *The American New Woman Revisited*, ed. Martha Patterson (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 37.

Concerned about the rise of the New Woman and the supposed erosion of gender norms, William Lee Howard, M.D. expressed his thoughts in an entry in the *New York Medical Journal* in 1865 and connects the weakness of men to poor mothering, and the masculine mothers to poor breeding.

The female possessed of masculine ideas of independence; the vagrant who would sit in the public highways and lift up her pseudo-virile voice, proclaiming her sole right to decide questions of war or religion, or the value of celibacy and the curse of woman's impurity, and that disgusting antisocial being, the female sexual pervert, are simply beings, are simply different degrees of the same class--degenerates.<sup>24</sup>

His essay on the folly of these degenerate women, despite its early date, is evident of this strong backlash against vocal women. In line with the anti-New Woman sentiment, he used his medicinal background to construct an argument in eugenics. Similarly, Edward Bok, editor of *Ladies Home Journal* after 1889, mocks this "new" woman: "She must school herself, for instance, into the belief that she is defrauded of 'her rights' - just what rights it doesn't matter so much. She hasn't all her rights: that's enough. And she wants them. This fact she must shriek forth to a patient and long-suffering public."<sup>25</sup> To Bok, the New Woman is not a woman at all; she is shrill, irritating, irrational, and masculine. While attending an institution of higher learning often marked women as New Women, he saw this as senseless because he believed that women attending colleges led to irrationality and chaos.

In her 1898 speech, famed anarchist and feminist rights activist and thinker Emma Goldman said, "Women cannot without equal opportunity rise to equality with him, and hence women are slaves to society as a consequence, and intensified under the marriage

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<sup>24</sup> William Lee Howard, M.D., "Effeminate Men and Masculine Women" (1865) in *The American New Woman Revisited*, ed. Martha Patterson (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 279-281.

<sup>25</sup> Edward Bok, "At Home with the Editor," (1894) in *The American New Woman Revisited*, ed. Martha Patterson (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 129- 131.

code.”<sup>26</sup> Many critics of the New Woman worried Goldman would undermine popular perceptions of marriage. Goldman critiqued the economic dependence many women were forced to ascribe to whether under their father’s guardianship or their husband’s. Women also had limited opportunities for employment, and when they were employed, they made less than their male counterparts. However, even with a college education, women were often financially vulnerable and needed a man in their lives for support.

Amidst this era of tension between Victorian conventions and the Woman Question, there was a blurring of ideology. While many women were stepping outside of their sphere of influence, they were still pressured to do so in an inherently feminine way. Mary R. Melendy’s 1903 medical guide for women *Perfect Womanhood for Maidens--Wives--Mothers* emphasizes this tension and hopes that women remember this sense of essential womanhood in mothering.

Woman's labors and successes, in the various fields and affairs of life, are calling daily for more and more attention. While we admire her in her new role, with her efforts toward success in society, literature, science, politics, and the arts, we must not lose sight of her most divine and sublime mission in life-- womanhood and motherhood.<sup>27</sup>

She notes this shift in the women’s experience. By 1900, more women are in the workforce and expanding their influence on the world, in every capacity. However, Melendy reiterates the importance of rooting a woman’s existence in her role as the mother. While the New Woman may enter the public sphere and take on more masculine characteristics, she still needs to remember that in order to have a fulfilling life, she must return to the home, get married, and have children.

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<sup>26</sup> Emma Goldman, “The New Woman” (Feb. 1898) in *The American New Woman Revisited*, ed. Martha Patterson (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 62-63.

<sup>27</sup> Melendy, *Perfect Motherhood*, first page of preface.

The debate over the New Woman and her “liberation” refers to the increased opportunities for middle to upper middle class white women and the New Woman’s experience is predominantly their story. However, the struggle for autonomy ran through and continues to exist for women of color, along with white women, and of the lower classes. When I write about the time between 1890 and 1930, I am writing about the experiences of privileged women who, due to the bicycle, brassiere, and access to education found a sense of liberation and independence previously unknown to them. It is important to note that women in the lower classes and women of color did not yet have the same opportunities, but had been working outside the home in order to survive long before the social shifts analyzed in this thesis. Their voices and experiences are just as important.

This thesis discusses how women took advantage of the technologies and opportunities afforded by the brassiere, bicycle, and higher education to reinforce their liberation from the domestic sphere, into public space. In the second chapter, I use women’s shift in support garments from the corset to the brassiere to discuss anxiety about the female form and body during this time of change. I examine medical texts, advice literature, and advertisements from *Ladies’ Home Journal* to analyze the scientific and aesthetic reasons why women wore corsets, exactly who wanted women to wear corsets, and why women moved to the brassiere. These primary sources let me consider how and why did advertisers frame it the way they did to persuade women to make the switch. This research illustrates that Victorian morality feared the female body, and this fear manifested in the physical restricting of the corset. Once women moved from the

corset, their bodies were less restrained and they had more choice in how they dressed and moved with public and domestic space.

In the third chapter, I discuss the growing popularity of the bicycle in the 1890s to examine how the physical independent movement of women from the private sphere into the public changed how women navigated that masculine space, how Victorians perceived them as they moved autonomously, and what those tensions reveal about the anxiety of diverting from gender performance. Female cyclists critiqued biological and moral rationale for limiting the woman's sphere to the domestic space. In the fourth chapter, I discuss how the rising normalcy of women's higher education in the form of seminaries, co-educational and all-female universities allowed their female students to enter male-dominated academia and compete intellectually (with the official backing of their diplomas) with their male counterparts. As women moved into this historically masculine space and challenged it with this physical presence and intellectual prowess, they were able to shake Victorian gender roles and gain more independence and experiences.

What do these writers and their discussions on gender reflect about the greater American society at the time? The backlash against women leaving the domestic and private sphere from individuals like William Lee Howard, Edward Bok, and Ouida illuminates the anxiety about gender performance and its shift during this time. No one truly understood women's roles, thus this decades-long dialogue of back and forth between supporters and dissenters politicized women's movement into public space. This discussion and its implications drive this thesis in order to uncover what it revealed about greater American perceptions of gender.

In the 1920s, the Flapper, made infamous by F. Scott Fitzgerald and his inspiration and love Zelda Sayre, stayed out late, entertained male friends



Figure 1.1: Poster for silent film "Casey at the Bat" (1927) courtesy of *The American New Woman Revisited*, ed. Martha Patterson (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 273.

unaccompanied, laughed loudly, and smoked. As the movie poster for the silent film *Casey at the Bat* (1927) illustrates (Figure 1.1), the Flapper served as a reaction to her Victorian sister. As editor of *Smart Set* magazine and women's suffrage supporter H.L. Mencken reflects on the flapper in 1915:

Well, well, let us be exact: let us not say innocence. This Flapper, to tell the truth, is far, far, far from a simpleton. An Ingénue to the Gaul, she is actually as devoid of ingenuousness as a newspaper reporter, a bartender, or a midwife. The age she lives in is one of knowledge. She herself is educated. She is privy to dark secrets. The world bears to her no aspect of mystery. She has been taught how to take care of herself.<sup>28</sup>

Mencken, even though here he addresses the flapper, hits on the main crux of the New Woman: she is knowledgeable and independent. This woman has real world experience, from the real world itself and can be on her own. This autonomous woman diverts this idea of essential womanliness constructed in Victorian conventions as the innocent and pure keeper of morality within the sanctified confines of the home. As more and more

<sup>28</sup> H.L. Mencken, "The Flapper" (1915) in *The American New Woman Revisited*, ed. Martha Patterson (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 84-86.

women adopted rational dress with their brassieres, rode their bicycles, and attended universities, their infiltration of public space continued to threaten the patriarchal structure, and continues to today.



## **Chapter II: Slipping into Something More Comfortable; American Women Busting Out of the Victorian Female Form**

In her the chapter on Corsets in her 1903 medical text *Perfect Womanhood*, Dr.

Mary R. Melendy remarks:

There are always a few men and women ready to enter into the light of new possibilities. The belief that we must be old at fifty and in our graves at seventy-five, is fast becoming a thing of the past. There are those to-day who are younger and healthier at fifty than they were at fifteen, and this renewed life is possible to all who are willing to renounce their old ideas and march forward under the banner of progress.<sup>29</sup>

Melendy's claim that the possibility that the renouncement of old ideas would reveal a "renewed life" under the "banner of progress" addressed this era of rapid social reorganization. In the beginnings of the twentieth century, questions of race, gender, and class immersed the United States. These societal shifts and questions became evident when the old met with the new and this clash resulted in anxiety.

In an era of staunch, dichotomous gender roles, dress reform shook the foundations of separate spheres in terms of blurring the female form. Dress reform occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This reform for women manifested in bloomers, trimmed hemlines, and dress adapted to a more active lifestyle. Naturally, this transition caused an uproar among Victorians. However, the changing role of women in society pushed these boundaries. This transition, spurred by dress reform, created tensions between reformers and Victorian conventions. Increasingly accessible leisure time and openings in the labor markets led to the increasing popularity of exercise and more mobility. With this opportunity, middle class women needed greater stamina and mobility as they entered the workplace as lecturers, doctors, and

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<sup>29</sup> Mary R Melendy. *Perfect Womanhood*, 1903, 317.

office assistants. Shifts in undergarments revolutionized not only how women wore clothes, but what they were able to accomplish in those clothes.

Historian Jill Fields recalls that the social distinction between female and male clothing is essential to defining and perpetuating gender difference.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, distinctions between the feminine and masculine silhouettes were indicative of gender and social standing. Even today, the clothes we wear are a projection of who we are; an expression of character and social status. Similarly, popular fashions and trends serves as a form of social control in how they are perceived, and what they do. The corset was one such way of Victorian social control, as it physically constrained women. It affected how they inhabited the space they navigated, in that the corset seriously constrained the physical movement of the women who wore them. As a display of status, upper class women necessitated less movement because they had the privilege of not needing to exert as much energy as women of the working classes. The more privilege the woman had, the less financial independence she had, and the more she was subject to male supervision. Therefore, the social ideal of Victorian conventions expressed prestige in restricted movement for women, while also influencing women to aspire to less independent movement and autonomy.

In this chapter, I look at how historians examined the history and impact of the transition from corset to brassiere and analyze the societal implications of the medical debates, the woman-driven push for dress reform, and the moral groundings of whether the brassiere or corset was most appropriate. These complexities of the corset and brassiere reveal anxiety about shifts in gender performance. Victorian concerns go further than just the need for social control of women, to a genuine fear of the female

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<sup>30</sup> Jill Fields. *An Intimate Affair: Women, Lingerie, and Sexuality*. University of California Press, 2007, 2.

body and what happens when it transgresses its allotted space in patriarchal Victorian society. Brassiere manufacturers presented women a new option in their choices about their body and health. The brassiere allowed them more movement and potential for challenging oppressive social conventions. I argue that the American women's transition from the corset to the brassiere allowed women increased mobility and access to a public and traditionally masculine sphere, where their very bodies threatened lingering Victorian patriarchal societal conventions.

I first provide the historical context for this transition of women to present a background for grounds of debate about the female form and how undergarments shaped that discussion. Then I discuss the role of the corset in women's fashion for women, and its implications of gender performance. The corset had many critics and attacks from women's dress reform organizations in early twentieth century. Yet, as corsetry as an industry diminished, corset manufacturers fought back and pushed with the faux medical benefits which made their undergarment "essential" to a woman's life. As women began the transition from corset to brassiere in the late nineteenth century, I discuss the role and propagation of the brassiere in the American woman's life, and the opportunities wearing it allowed, which were previously unavailable. I analyze advertisements for both corsets and brassieres, along with medical texts and advice literature written by individuals both praising and condemning the undergarments, to evaluate the effects of the brassiere and to study the shift away from the restrictive corset. These primary sources reveal how the brassiere not only made women's lives more comfortable, but allowed them the mobility needed to navigate a masculine public sphere.

Historians who study the shift from the popularity of the corset to the brassiere and the women who propagated it take different approaches to analyzing its contested history and contemporary implications of gender. As such, the several historians and writers I use for this research question address the multi-faceted and implicated approaches Americans took to examine and interpret the long shift from the corset to the brassiere. In “Brassieres and Women’s Health from 1863-1940,” social historians Jane Farrell Beck, Laura Poresky, Jennifer Paff, and Cassandra Moon provide a historical context for the development of the brassiere, and the medical rationale for its rising popularity.<sup>31</sup> They frame the propagation of the brassiere and dress reform in medical terms and medical knowledge. As women adopted the brassiere, they were able to follow medical advice, relieve pressure on their abdomen, and improve their posture, physical and reproductive health. Additionally, they write about the integral role of women themselves in dress reform. Without women pressuring the medical community as mothers, caregivers, and patients themselves, questioning the practicality of the corset for day-to-day life and movement within even the private sphere would have gone much slower. By the early twentieth century, women themselves were quietly entering the fields of obstetrics and gynecology, accessing knowledge, however limited, of the damaging nature of corsets and helping their sisters by promoting brassieres as an alternative.

Accrediting shifts in innovation and technology to the changes in the woman’s experience also influenced the rising popularity of the brassiere over the corset. In *Uplift; The Bra in America*, historians Jane Farrell-Beck and Colleen Gau limit their analysis and

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<sup>31</sup> Farrell-Beck, J., Poresky, L., Paff, J., & Moon, C. *Brassieres and Women’s Health from 1863 to 1940*. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 16(3), 105-115. 1998.

historical context to the beginning of the development of the brassiere and the discussions concerning the new technologies used in its innovation and its rise to popularity.<sup>32</sup> They specifically mention that they limit their analysis to the United States and attempt to examine the history of the bra without second-wave feminist implications of the oppression of this garment. Farrell-Beck and Gau argue that only by removing the bra out of contemporary bias of the bra as restricting can historians understand its transformative nature and role in American society. I particularly utilize their chapters on the invention of the brassiere, and how it became popular for historical context through which to layer my primary sources upon for analysis.

Additionally, contemporary historians analyze the development of the brassiere as a pathway to lessened social control of women's sexuality. Social historian Jill Fields in her book *An Intimate Affair: Women, Lingerie, and Sexuality* argues that societal dress codes were a means of social control.<sup>33</sup> By examining specifically undergarments, Fields analyzes social control through a gendered lens because undergarments are directly tied to sexuality. Therefore, anxiety around the condition and construction of these garments reveals tension about the changing status of women. She argues that understanding the historical context for how the commercialization and support of corsets shaped the way that women view their own bodies can help us reshape how we conceive of how gender is constructed.<sup>34</sup> Fields writes an inclusive and layered history using several different disciplines to examine the culture around transformative undergarment fashion in order to

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<sup>32</sup> Jane Farrell-Beck and Colleen Gau. *Uplift: The Bra in America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.

<sup>33</sup> Jill Fields. *An Intimate Affair: Women, Lingerie, and Sexuality*. University of California Press, 2007.

<sup>34</sup> Fields, *An Intimate Affair*, 47.

show how women's attempts to express their own desires and bodies also shaped the industry that produced intimate apparel.

However, cultural and fashion historian Valerie Steele argues that the history of the corset was more nuanced than a form of social control and an extension of the patriarchy. In her book *The Corset: A Cultural History* she aims to go beyond the myth of corsetry as torture and examine its implications as an expression of artistry, youth, status, and erotica.<sup>35</sup> She acknowledges that the corset did negatively impact some women's experience "as a coercive apparatus through which patriarchal society controlled women and exploited their sexuality."<sup>36</sup> Steele writes that the corset was also worn by men, and women wore variations of this garment in ways not necessarily harmful to their bodies. She even acknowledges the corset as an instrument of liberation for some of these women as an expression of individuality. While exploring these nuances is critical to a thorough argument, in most cases corsets inhibited physical movement and the shift from the corset to the brassiere allotted women more of that freedom. Yes, some corsets were looser and less harmful to the body than others, but there is overwhelming American literature from 1890 through 1930 which condemns the corset and tight-lacing, in general. My research question addresses this span of time where corsets were generally seen as more bad than good; not a sexually liberating erotic choice but a menace to the female form.

Historians who focus their work on a specific era can zoom in on a certain aspects of shifts which occur over many years. American historian Joshua Zeitz's book *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and the Women who made America Modern*

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<sup>35</sup> Valerie Steele. *The Corset; a Cultural History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

<sup>36</sup> Steele, *The Corset; a Cultural History*, 1.

takes apart the United States in the 1920s to study that average white woman's experience.<sup>37</sup> He uses census reports, newspapers, interviews, and literature of the time to paint a portrait of the flapper and how she influenced and in turn was influenced by American culture and technology. Zeitz argues that the Flapper was an international woman who changed the perception of women and pushed the boundary between the masculine and feminine. For the sake of this thesis, I use Zeitz's Part II, which discusses who how the Flapper and Coco Chanel influenced women's fashion and the end of the corset.

Amid these historians, my thesis provides a synthesis of these perspectives. The implications of the culturally, bodily, and psychologically restrictive corset paved the way for the literal and figurative freedom the brassiere presented for women. Life in a corset compared to life in a brassiere differed. Life in a brassiere implied the ability to use one's body to its fullest potential. Ultimately, the new opportunities and narratives for women paralleled that of the shift from the corset to the brassiere. These two projections impacted the other. Women needed the brassiere as they entered the workplace and the demand of corset manufacturers decreased. Yet simultaneously, when women entered these new spheres and increased their physical movement, they needed an alternative.

## **Historical Background**

The corset's origins go back into antiquity, but have consistently made reappearances in women's fashion until today. For early modern European elites, an

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<sup>37</sup> Joshua Zeitz. *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and the Women Who Made America Modern*. Kindle. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006.

extremely slender waist, achieved by tight-lacing, was revered and much desired. For example, in the sixteenth century, Catherine de Medici of France had a rumored impressive thirteen inch waist, which was seen as the height of fashion.<sup>38</sup> In the eighteenth century, Catherine the Great of Russia had an almost-as-impressive seventeen inch waist. As this trend continued, Mark Connors wrote a history of the corset in the United States in the late nineteenth century, which provides a late nineteenth century view on the evils of the corset in the sixteenth century. In his 1894 medical text, Connors wrote on the corset: “No lady could consider her figure proper shape unless she could span her waist with her two hands. To produce this result a strong rigid corset was worn night and day until the waist was laced down to the required size.”<sup>39</sup> However, he also differentiated the sixteenth century corset as one made of steel, and how it changed over time, thus allowing women to live more comfortably. He notes that in the eighteenth century, corsets were constructed of a leather also used to make shoe soles, illustrating this critical shift.<sup>40</sup>

In the mid-nineteenth century, health experts blasted the corset and tight-lacing as detrimental to women’s health for an array of medical and aesthetic reasons such as “Stiff, inflexible waists with a coarsely exaggerated contour in place of slight and subtle curves[...] Sick, sallow complexion[...] Distorted features[...] Ugly shoulders.”<sup>41</sup> Many medical experts offered solutions to this corset problem within the corset context. They offered suggestions for how to modify the corset and contend with the negative side effects, but rarely did they offer an alternative to the corset. For example, rather than

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<sup>38</sup> Mark Connors. *Torch Lights on Health*. 1894.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>41</sup> Mary R. Melendy, *Perfect Womanhood*, 1903.



promote the brassiere, Dr. Mary R. Melendy suggested exercise, rest, and fresh air.<sup>42</sup> In her book *For Girls: A Special Physiology*, Mrs. E. R. Shephard suggested that women wore a corset with shoulder straps to place the majority of the pressure on the shoulders rather than the hips, in addition to taking out the whale bones to make corsets less rigid.<sup>43</sup>

It was not until the mid-to-late nineteenth century when innovative women and men created proto-brassieres to alleviate the health problems which the corset had caused women for years. In the early twentieth century, women decided to use the brassiere because it was a more durable and versatile garment than the corset. In brassiere or breast supporter, the breasts were supported by the shoulders, rather than the hips which was ultimately healthier for the woman's whole body.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, the fashion of the 1920s officially ended the long reign of the corset. Typical flapper fashion, popularized by Coco Chanel, revolutionized New Woman fashion by helping phase out the corset and blurring the line between masculine and feminine dress.

As American women and manufacturers became more enthusiastic about the development of the brassiere, it slowly made its way into mainstream stores at affordable prices competitive with prices of corsets. There were two different phases of brassiere production and distribution. From 1890-1917, brassieres, or more commonly known as breast supporters, were sold primarily through mail order by regional firms, whereas from 1906-1917, these manufacturers distributed their products which were sold through

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

Tight-lacing was seen as the largest health issue that corsets presented to women. It was the process of lacing one's corset as tightly as possible and often worn at all times in order to compress the waist until one has their ideal waist. This practice was known to weaken the lungs and put unnatural amounts of pressure on the inner organs and induce long-term health problems.

<sup>43</sup> Shephard, E. R. *For Girls: A Special Physiology; Being a Supplement to the Study of General Physiology*. Ninth. (Chicago: Sanitary Publishing Co., 1887).

<sup>44</sup> Melendy, *Perfect Womanhood*, 90.

stores, often as specialty items.<sup>45</sup> During the first phase of production, these brassieres were considered specialty stock because they were marketed for women who wanted a full silhouette of a corset, yet needed full use of their lungs such as athletes, pregnant women, vocalists, readers, and lecturers.<sup>46</sup>

In this early breast supporter advertisement from *Ladies' Home Journal* in July 1898 (Figure 2.1), all of the support for the breasts lie on the shoulders, with the three straps on either side, and supports around the bust, yet not shaping the waist.<sup>47</sup> The advertisement stresses how this breast supporter gives



Figure 2.1: Advertisement, Mrs. C. D. Newell, courtesy of *Ladies' Home Journal*, July 1898.

“coolness and dress comfort, ventilation, a perfect shape bust and free and easy movement of the body.” Mrs. C.D. Newell of Chicago promises both beauty and health with the purchase of one of her breast supporters. Additionally, Mrs. C. D. Newell was not a large company like the Ferris Brothers or the Michigan Corset Company. Brassiere and breast supporter manufacturers were only by mail order primarily before 1917, when larger companies decided to make and sell them as well. Until demand increased, small manufacturers like Mrs. C.D. Newell worked on custom-made breast supporters.

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<sup>45</sup> Jane Farrell-Beck, and Colleen Gau. *Uplift: The Bra in America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.

It is also to note that the very origins of the first brassiere prototype are debated among historians, yet all agree upon the same era of the late nineteenth century as the time.

The first brassiere sold by a department store was in a Wyoming J.C. Penny in 1902. (Farrell-Beck and Gau. *Uplift*, 17)

<sup>46</sup> Farrell-Beck and Gau, *Uplift*, 13.

<sup>47</sup> Mrs. C. D. Newell Breast Supporters. Advertisement. *Ladies' Home Journal* July 1898: 29

There were many advantages and disadvantages to the brassiere over the corset in its early years of production. The brassiere allowed women more movement, and women could make it themselves and wash it easily, making the brassiere ultimately a more versatile undergarment. However, corsets were typically cheaper and factory made into certain sizes, while the early breast supporters were handmade, required more frequent washing because they were worn directly on the skin, and wore out more quickly.<sup>48</sup> Manufacturers had more trouble marketing brassieres because women could also sew their own breast supporters. It was more economical for women to fashion their own custom brassiere, which also threatened corset sales. The sewing magazine *The Delineator* sold patterns for 20 cents each and recommended fabrics like cotton brocade and ‘coutelle.’<sup>49</sup> Additionally, many women considered brassieres and breast supporters more comfortable and convenient than corsets, because of the buttons, close-knit design, and adjustable straps.<sup>50</sup>

Outerwear and clothing impacted the development of the brassiere, and vice versa, as women sought foundation garments which would help them achieve a fashionable silhouette. The Charles R. Bevoise Company produced the first modern brassiere in 1904.<sup>51</sup> In 1905, they structured this early brassiere out of bones to keep the breasts in shape and had the style of a modern camisole.<sup>52</sup> This breast support spanned from the top of the bust to mid waist, and structured the support of the bust from the shoulders. However comfortable, the brassiere did not initially make waves in American society because it did not align with fashion of the 1880s through the early 1900s. The

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<sup>48</sup> Farrell-Beck and Gau, *Uplift*, 17.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

silhouette created by the corset completed the dress style, with the long shapely waist and bust (illustrated in Figure 2.2). Similarly, in the 1910s, brassieres and bandeaux were marketed as way to shape the bust to the form of the fashionable dress, illustrated in this accompanying image.<sup>53</sup> In the 1890s-1910s, fashionable women wore long skirts covering a petticoat paired with a short jacket or blouse.<sup>54</sup> The women are covered from their throat to down past their toes. All of these women also model the famed S-Curve silhouette which was accomplished only through the corset and moderate tight-lacing.<sup>55</sup> This shift in brassiere manufacturing made it a versatile undergarment and more appealing to more women.



Figure 2.2: An example of the S-Curve constructed by corsets. Courtesy of *Ladies' Home Journal*, December 1897.

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<sup>53</sup> Farrell-beck and Gau, *Uplift*, 25.

<sup>54</sup> Nation Cloak Company. Advertisement. *Ladies Home Journal* December 1897: 38. Print.

<sup>55</sup> The S curve was achieved with a corset. It brought the waist in and the bust and extended posterior accentuated the small waist. In order to properly wear dresses at this time, women needed to wear the corset underneath for shaping.

## Loosening the Straps: The Corset Falls Out of Favor

Corset sales declined due to the dual effect of women's changing societal role and their entry into the workforce. As women's roles evolved from primarily exerting influence within the domestic sphere to slowly moving into the public, they eventually needed to utilize the full potential of their bodies' abilities. Corset manufacturers only began to worry about their sales after 1910 and societal shifts, just as dancing at tango parties, entering the workforce, and academic and physical education necessitated women more freedom of movement.<sup>56</sup> These activities reflected alterations in women's movements and fashions. For example, the boyish, svelte frame of the 1920s Flapper conflicted with the S curve form, and wearing a corset made physical education courses more difficult. Additionally, by 1890 17.4% of women over the age of ten were employed and needed new underclothing to help them move without restriction.<sup>57</sup>

As medical authorities placed the corset industry under fire in the late nineteenth century, many corset manufactures emphasized the comfort and health that their product provided. The Jackson Corset Company emphasized that their corset was modeled for the "American woman" and "Will fit you like a glove and keep you shapely and healthy."<sup>58</sup> The G-D Chicago Waist Corset Company advertised a corset that adjusts to upcoming fashions.<sup>59</sup> Both of these companies' marketing strategies to recognize the concerns by the medical community and echoed by women about the dangers of the corset.

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<sup>56</sup> Fields, *Intimate Affairs*, 47.

<sup>57</sup> Farrell-Beck and Gau, *Uplift*, 27.

<sup>58</sup> Jackson Corset Company. Advertisement. *Ladies' Home Journal*. December 1897: 35. Print.

<sup>59</sup> G-D Chicago Corset. Advertisement. *Ladies Home' Journal*. December 1897: 41. Print

A large concern which supported the corset was not only the fashion essentiality, but the necessity of the corset to support the healthy posture of the body. Women were

encouraged to wear corsets from a very young age in order to supply a much needed aid for their bodies.

Figure 2.3, for example, is a Ferris corset company advertisement from 1900 which says that their Childhood Comfort Corsets will prevent the “shoulders from drooping, the waist from spreading.” Meanwhile, it promotes good health, while implying that the female body cannot naturally exude grace, nor proper form. For this reason, the Childhood Comfort corset not only artificially aided development but perpetuated this desire to police women’s bodies from a young age.



Figure 2.3: Ferris Childhood Comfort Advertisement, courtesy of *Ladies' Home Journal*, November 1900.

This anxiety about loss of the female form also permeated marketing corsets to adult women. In as late

as 1921, G.B. Pulfer, the treasuring and general manager of the Kalamazoo Corset Company defended the corset,

claiming:

Fear! Fear of ill health, fear of sagging bodies, fear of lost figure, fear of shiftless appearance in the nicest of clothing, fear of sallow complexion. Fear sends them to the corsetiere, trembling; the same corsetiere from whom they fled mockingly a couple of years back, at the beck of a mad style authority who decreed 'zat ze body must be free of ze restrictions, in order zat ze new styles shall hang so freely.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

Pulfer acknowledges a real tension at the beginning of the twentieth century as women decided whether the corset or brassiere was better for their health. Pulfer also plays on this decisive fear women had. His description of women first being fearful of the corset and then being fearful without the corset creates an image of a fickle and shallow woman, motivated by intimidation and fads of the time. This is significant because it shows the influence of the commercial corset industry on the consumer. Pulfer played on women's fear of loss of figure and undesirability to make money on a product threatened by dress reformers and medical professionals.

Mary R. Melendy's 1903 medical guide *Perfect Womanhood for Maidens--Wives--Mothers*, serves as a juxtaposition to Pulfer's analysis of the fickle nature of woman because she, as a female doctor, discussed the state of women's dress.<sup>61</sup> She wrote, "From neck to toe there should be absolute freedom. It is only since women began to awaken to her individual needs that she has declared against bands, steels, bones, and stays. Healthful dress is always compatible with artistic dress."<sup>62</sup> Melendy equated allowing one's body its full, natural movement with reason and beauty. Reason comes with education, and her medical guide as a manual for women to consult by a woman is revolutionary. While male doctors and medical professionals also spoke out against the harmful effects of prolonged corset wearing, Melendy's work on women's health was

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<sup>61</sup> Mary R. Melendy. *Perfect Womanhood*, 1903. For reference, Elizabeth Blackwell was the first female doctor in the United States in around 1850, so medicine was still a young profession for women, where many average Americans and male doctors disapproved of and discredited Dr. Blackwell's work. (Wilson, Tracy V., and Holly Frey. Elizabeth Blackwell, America's First Female M.D. Stuff You Missed in History Class.

<sup>62</sup> Melendy, *Perfect Womanhood*, 318.

only one small section of wide-reaching women's involvement in dress reform and inventing alternatives to the brassiere.<sup>63</sup>

Melendy also makes a fascinating connection of a woman's physical health in a corset to her mental health. In *Perfect Womanhood*, Melendy writes *Madame Yale's* list of infractions of the corset and one of these twelve is "Lack of buoyancy, general feebleness, lassitude, apathy, and stupidity."<sup>64</sup> She connects the constricting of the corset to a woman's energy, enthusiasm, and intelligence. Thus, the corset is impeding not only a woman's body, but also her mind. As women moved into the public sphere as job opportunities became more and more available to them, the removal of the corset allowed them more physical movement and made them more of a threat intellectually. A woman who physically transgressed traditional gender boundaries, such as Melendy in the medical field, threatened these preconceived gender norms because more educated professions were finally open to some women. However, women who made these transgressions, thought critically, and proved to be intellectual equals to the men around them were seen as truly deviant and a great threat to the standing system of unchallenged patriarchal power.

### **Brassieres and Movement of Women**

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the woman's role inside and outside of the home shifted. Lack of unnecessary movement defined the Victorian

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<sup>63</sup> Interestingly, Melendy does not offer the brassiere as a healthy alternative to the corset. She only lists the many negatives and how to treat the symptoms of these long-term side effects. She suggests uninterrupted rest, fresh air, and sleeping on one's left side to aid digestion, and fasting as ways to combat the work corsets have already done. (Melendy, *Perfect Womanhood*, 320.)

<sup>64</sup> Melendy, *Perfect Womanhood*, 319.



feminine ideal. Women began to work in the public sphere of influence in the late nineteenth century, and they were more likely to find themselves in an office, commercial, or academic setting. From 1890-1920, there were several important shifts within women's employment: Domestic and personal service declined sharply, manufacturing, mechanical industry, agriculture, forestry, and animal husbandry declined, while professional services doubled and clerical work opened as a new field.<sup>65</sup> There were also noted increases in education, with women working as professors, college presidents, and primary and secondary school teachers.<sup>66</sup> These new demands in the workforce necessitated a wardrobe alteration for women. However, brassiere manufacturers did not find any stable success until after 1910.<sup>67</sup>

Even though corsets were a fashion necessity, they inhibited a fully-functioning body. For this reason, medical experts came out with literature condemning the corset. The brassiere allowed professional women to use their bodies to their full potential and increase their achievement in the workplace. In her *Ladies' Home Journal* column "My Girls," Margaret E. Sangster advised young women on how to pursue a job after school. She encouraged them to study the Domestic Sciences and wrote:

Home economics are yet in their infancy... Physical culture is more and more inviting the attention of those who believe that a sound mind is best housed in a sound body. A girl who means to become an instructor in this field must know how to develop her own lungs and chest, how to row a boat, how to play basketball, how to live in harmony with hygienic rules, and withal she must be refined, well-bred, equal to emergencies, and a lady.<sup>68</sup>

Sangster writes about this evolving "physical culture" where a "sound mind" and "sound body" go hand in hand. She advises young women to enter home economics, but

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<sup>65</sup> Farrell-Beck and Gau, *Uplift*, 27.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>68</sup> Margaret E. Sangster, "My Girls," *Ladies' Home Journal*, November 1900, 38.

even in these historically feminine studies within the women's sphere of influence, she warns that there will be more movement. She specifically notes how women need to know "how to develop her own lungs and chest," advocating that women need to utilize the full potential of their bodies. As women moved into the workplace, they had to embrace some sort of dress reform in order to access this new physical culture and be of sound mind and body, because their possible studies and occupations in new space would require it of them, similar to their male counterparts.

Corset companies came to terms with the competition from brassiere manufacturers because of the negative health effects of the corset. They began to market the corset in way which promoted their product in a more healthful light. The Ferris Brothers' Company even designed advertisements to illustrate how active a woman could be while laced in one of their corsets (see Figure 2.4). They market their corset under the theme of flexibility. They write that their corset meant "freedom from rigid restriction" and to drive the point home, their advertisement features a woman golfing while wearing their corset. They emphasize how versatile their product was for women, in an out of the home, which illustrates this pressure on corset manufacturers to create more flexible and comfortable products. Possibly due to this



Figure 2.4 Ferris Good Waists Advertisement, courtesy of *Ladies' Home Journal*, September 1900.

tension, brassiere manufacturers did not find any stable success until after 1910 because corset companies could still compete with this method of advertisement.<sup>69</sup>

Women weren't permitted to move into certain spaces, and the corset ensured this. By confining a woman's body by the very clothes on her back, the personal became political. An English mother who became an advocate for dress reform remarked about her daughter's energy levels in relation to the corset.<sup>70</sup> She went to boarding school uncorseted, came home corseted and went from being a "merry, romping girl" to a "tall pale lady."<sup>71</sup> This example illustrates a psychological toll the corset placed on women. Zeitz quotes a corset defender, "'The corset is an ever present reminder,' argued yet another man, 'indirectly bidding its wearing to exercise self-restraint: it is evidence of a well-disciplined mind and well-regulated feelings.'" As the young girl's state in the corset reveals, the corset served as a form of social control to police behavior. Due to the corset, women were physically molded into the "weaker sex" because this undergarment weakened the lungs, induced dizzy spells, anxiety, and lethargy.

The corset served as a form of social control to remind women of the behavior and movement appropriate for their socially and historically constructed gender. Historian Joshua Zeitz notes that the defenders of the corset mainly spoke in terms of control and confinement. "By painfully disciplining women's bodies, clothing helped impose the political and social insubordination of America's daughters and wives and enforced the rigid separation between the masculine public sphere and the feminine

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<sup>69</sup> Farrell-Beck and Gau, *Uplift*, 17.

<sup>70</sup> Joshua Zeitz. *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and the Women Who Made America Modern*. Kindle. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006. Location 2179 of 5904: Kindle edition.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

domestic sphere." <sup>72</sup> Corsets as the popular fashion of the time had a twofold effect on the subjugation of women. One, fashion trends serve as a way to discern gender and to place individuals into neat categories of man or woman. As Zeitz stated, corsets helped “impose the political and social insubordination” of women because they labeled them and physically inhibited them in a specifically gendered way.

The second effect of corsets on the subjugation of women resides in the social control of women. Zeitz writes: “A Victorian man admitted that ‘half of the charm in a small waist comes not in spite of, but on account of, its being tight-laced.’”<sup>73</sup> The distinction between “not in spite of, but on account of” illustrates that the man found the small waist attractive simply because it was tight-laced. All medical authorities condemned tight-lacing as a very unhealthy way for women to try to achieve a certain type of ideal body and placed excessive pressure on the abdomen and crushed internal organs. The Victorian feminine ideal, as illustrated by this man’s comment, was a small, obedient, sedentary, and quiet woman. Corsets, as a form of social control, perpetuated not only an unhealthy fashion, but also policed the “weaker sex” to stay psychologically and physically weaker.

In a *Ladies’ Home Journal* editorial entitled “The Importance of Being Beautiful” by Mr. I of Pawtucket, Rhode Island. writes:

Now that women have the vote and are getting into Congress and the House of Commons, and holding public office generally, and are becoming bank presidents, captains of industry, doctors, lawyers and dentists, isn’t it about time they adopted a different attitude toward dress and self-adornment? Surely it isn’t so important for them now to be beautiful, or astonishing, or dazzling [...] They can afford to be plain, stern and aggressive, and dress the part.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Zeitz, *Flapper*, Location 2166 of 5904: Kindle edition.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, Location 2195 of 5904: Kindle edition.

<sup>74</sup> Mr. I, “The Importance of Being Beautiful,” *Ladies’ Home Journal*, February 1921, 36.

After women entered public space, they still needed to be obviously identified as female in order to stay within the confines of gender norms, even though they were already transgressing gendered spatial boundaries. However, Mr. I questions this perception of gender performance in a progressive way. He took the conversation from simply focusing on whether or not the woman looked feminine enough and dressed appropriately, to if she dressed comfortably enough to perform a job equal to her male counterparts.

Why is the transition from the corset to the brassiere significant? This shift in underwear goes beyond personal preference. The rigid and constricting corset compressed not only a woman's inner organs, but also her ability to move and fully participate in society. Women began the shift from the corset to the brassiere in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century because they needed more mobility. Brassieres signify a physical movement into the public sphere where women had heightened interactions with men, and needed an adjusted wardrobe for their new roles. Their bodies freer for work, and their minds, less occupied by focusing to make their lungs function normally, threatened overall patriarchal physical entitlement to space.

In the mid-to-late half of the twentieth century, the feminist perception of the brassiere shifted from that of an alternative to the corset, to an extension of patriarchal control and subjugation of women. Many second wave feminists in the 1960s and 1970s, famous for their bra burnings, sought out as much distance as possible from a system of gender oppression. Today, in the early twenty-first century, many women perceive the bra with more nuance. While it may have roots in patriarchal policing of women's bodies and forms, many women they have more agency in choosing what kind of garment to

purchase. The sports bra, even further from the brassiere's historical roots in the corset, offers yet another alternative for women, where the point is comfort. It is specifically designed for active women who want some breast support, but no limitations to their movement.

Ultimately, our perceptions of the brassiere depend upon historical context. When the New Women discovered the brassiere in the early 1900s, it came as a welcome relief to the tightness of the corset. Yet when the second wave feminists looked back at the subjugation of women in the United States, the bra was yet another implementation of patriarchal social control of women's bodies. However, we must consider the historical origins and importance of certain shifts and trends, such as the corset to the brassiere, as an important step in women achieving more autonomous movement. In their response to Mr. P's editorial, *Ladies' Home Journal* noted "What is coming, though-- and we are for it all the way-- is this: Women as women in their new spheres of influence will have more to say in a voice of authority on the subject of setting crazy styles than they have ever uttered in the past."<sup>75</sup> Little by little, women threw off these subtle restraints on their physical bodies and moved out into new spheres of influence.

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<sup>75</sup> Editor's Response, ed. Barton W. Currie, *Ladies' Home Journal*, February 1921, 36.

### **Chapter III** **Making Tire Marks on the Glass Ceiling;** **The New Woman Rides into Male Space**

For Maria Ward, the bicycle riding had several benefits. In her 1896 manual *Bicycling for Ladies : With Hints as to the Art of Wheeling, Advice to Beginners, Dress, Care of the Bicycle, Mechanics, Training, Exercise, Etc., Etc*, Maria Ward writes:

Bicycling is a modern sport, offering infinite variety and opportunity. As an exercise, at present unparalleled, it accomplishes much with the comparatively little expenditure of effort; as a relaxation, it has many desirable features; and its limitless possibilities, its future of usefulness, and the effect of its application to modern economic and social conditions, present a wide field for speculation.<sup>76</sup>

From the very start of her how-to manual for women desiring the ability to ride, Ward recognizes the potential of the bicycle. Despite its foundations in sport, the bicycle emerged at the end of the nineteenth century in western countries people of all genders, races, and ages could access the bicycle, whether for recreation or transportation. With the advent of the bicycle came the rising awareness of how far it could take the rider.

At the beginning of its widespread popularity in the mid-1890s, American women flocked to bicycling. While many authorities in the medical industry encouraged the cycling fad in general because of the dual benefits of exercise and affordable transportation, the bicycle was also a beacon of opportunity for American women. This new mode of transportation offered a unique chance for women to be autonomous. The opportunity to ride independently was an equalizing and exciting chance for women to find greater sovereignty.

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<sup>76</sup> Maria E. Ward, *Bicycling for Ladies : With Hints as to the Art of Wheeling, Advice to Beginners, Dress, Care of the Bicycle, Mechanics, Training, Exercise, Etc., Etc*. New York: Brentano's, 1896, 1.

The bicycle boomed in popularity after 1890 among women. This bicycle craze cannot be examined without discussing the tension it created between the Victorian ideals, which structured most of the nineteenth century, and the progressive ideas about gender roles due to new opportunities for women. Since female cyclists were more likely to exhibit improper dress and manners, Victorians perceived bicycling for women as the antithesis to acceptable social conventions. In this chapter, I argue that the bicycle was both a symbolic and literal mode of liberation for women in that it allowed them to physically move from one space to another. Women entered new spheres beginning in 1890 through the 1930s, through increased access to jobs and higher education. This cultural shift illustrates this change in societal perceptions of the female body and what the female body's potential with male space. This shift from the Victorian female body's proper, ascribed sphere affected gendered expectations. Ultimately, this societal change made women a threat to male-dominated spaces by helping women access the public sphere independently and confidently.

Historians have different perspectives on the connection of the bicycle to the changing perceptions of gender in the 1890s through the 1930s. For historical context of the bicycle in American society, social historian Robert A. Smith takes a broader contextual approach to examining the effects of the rising popularity of the bicycle on American society and culture.<sup>77</sup> He places the influence of the bicycle on gender into the larger narrative of the social impacts it made in athletics, transportation, economics, and dress reform for both men and women, and how it began a new discussion around medicine, health, and morality. The bicycle infiltrated every aspect of American life from its introduction in the 1880s, through the beginning of the twentieth century. Most

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<sup>77</sup> Robert A. Smith, *A Social History of the Bicycle*. United States: American Heritage Press.



importantly for Smith, the bicycle served as a great equalizer, from religious elite, to men and women of all socioeconomic backgrounds and life experiences.

Historians also examine the bicycle craze with an emphasis on gendered experiences. Ellen Gruber Garvey looks at magazine advertisements pertaining to bicycles for women to see the complexity of the social context.<sup>78</sup> She writes on how the bicycle allowed women to physically move into a new sphere. Her research focuses on the marketing of bicycles to women, but also the medical support and condemnation of women cycling. While early women's rights supporters encouraged women's physical activity for overall health benefits, those of staunch Victorian conventions voiced dissent, concerned that girls would learn about sex and masturbation on their first bicycle rides. According to Garvey, women mounted on bicycles confronted these ideas about gender norms and analysis of advertisements of bicycles with the context of the tension between Victorians and new female riders shows how bicycle manufacturers tried to navigate this conflict.

Historian Patricia Marks also analyzes the bicycle using a gender historian's perspective. She argues that Americans laughed with the New Woman rather than at her, as they did in Great Britain, which made her more human than just a caricature of women's liberation. This difference in attitude proves that Americans normalized bicycling for women more quickly than their British counterparts. She examines how the bicycle altered the Victorian gender binary through influencing dress reform, questioning the spheres of influence, and encouraging changes in perceptions of the female form. Unlike Garvey, Marks specifically looks to how women used the bicycle as a source of

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<sup>78</sup> Patricia Marks. *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky. 1990.

physical freedom. While her book traces the transformation of the Victorian Lady to the New Woman, she examines language used during this era such as “womanly” versus “feminine” and “manly” versus “humane.” This illustrates the importance of language when discussing the complexity of the New Woman’s evolution of identity and how society’s perception of her; first as a caricature, and then as a person asserting herself.<sup>79</sup> She concludes that language has a tremendous power to ascribe identities upon an individual or group of people.

Understanding how the bicycle developed parallel to its societal impact is critical to illustrating how it is inseparable to the narrative of the transformation of the New Woman. In order to accomplish a thorough analysis of this connection, I will provide a brief bicycle history to understand the background on which national fascination with cycling occurs and how the bicycle functioned as a catalyst for social change. Then I will discuss how Victorian ideals conflicted with women cycling and how these ideals were simultaneously enforced and challenged through gender performativity. These challenges to Victorian ideals evolved into changing perceptions of gender performance, and the New Woman emerged. She rode the bicycle and moved more independently than her Victorian sister, and pushed the strict boundaries between men and women in the public sphere. The threat of her very body confronted anxieties about gender norms in public masculine space.

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<sup>79</sup> Patricia Marks. *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky. 1990.

## A Short Ride through Bicycle History

In 1867, the French Olivier brothers introduced the first commercial bicycle and named it “Michaud.”<sup>80</sup> This prototype launched the first bicycle races in France. This new transport gained even more popularity when American Albert A. Pope, inspired by the English bicycle, began to manufacture bicycles in bulk through his company, Columbia. In 1877, Pope and his young company manufactured the first high wheel

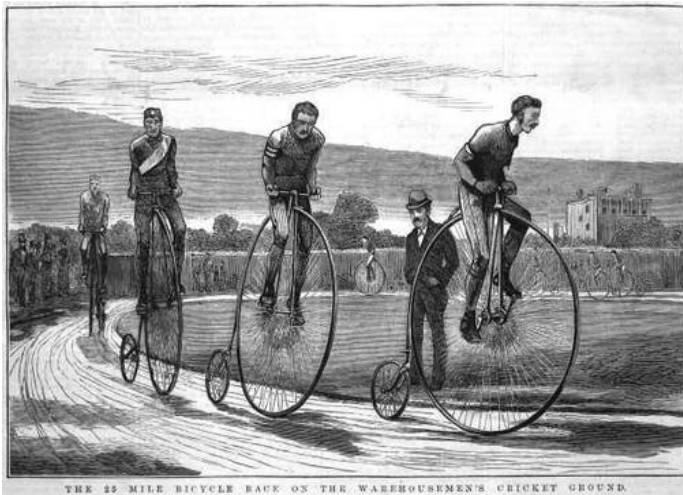


Figure 3.1: A High Wheel Bicycle Race, image courtesy of <http://www.highwheelrace.com/high-wheel-bicycles/>

American bicycle (see Figure 3.1), which weighed seventy-seven pounds for \$313.<sup>81</sup> Columbia publicized the bicycle by funding races and riding clubs in order to garner widespread support and use of their new technology.<sup>82</sup> These clubs propagated the utility of their machine and made it accessible to the average American. Pope even became a founding member of the League of American Wheelmen, which was an influential association that aspired to improve roads to make them more favorable to not only cycling, but for

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<sup>80</sup> The exact origin of the bicycle is contested, but we know that it came about as early as the seventeenth century. One source reveals that it was born in 1694 by a French mathematician Jacques Ozanam. However, this first machine was bulky, wooden, and ultimately ineffective. A realistic prototype for a proto-bicycle which could be possibly used for distance riding came about with mechanic Pierre Lallement. He reinvented the bicycle, and won the first patent for a “pedal-powered two wheeler” in 1863. (Jailer-Chamberlain, Mildred. “The Bicycle: From Boneshaker to Boom.” *Antiques & Collecting Magazine*, May 2002. [http://yb7zk3sd3g.search.serialssolutions.com/.](http://yb7zk3sd3g.search.serialssolutions.com/))

<sup>81</sup> Robert A. Smith. *A Social History of the Bicycle*. United States: American Heritage Press, 1972, 8.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

farmers to transport equipment and produce.<sup>83</sup> The public support and road improvement served as the American society's ringing approval for the bicycle and illustrates just how effective it was. The bicycle infiltrated American roads, influenced styles of dress, and affected how individuals interacted with one another.

The invention of the Rover bicycle in England in 1884 widened the accessibility of the bicycle because it was not as dangerous or high as other versions of the two wheeler. It had a more modern frame, with a low mount and a chain.<sup>84</sup> The 1880s also brought the tricycle into popularity, which made bicycling accessible to women. The



tricycle allowed for long skirts and, often in the early years, a chaperone. Unlike riding the high wheel model, which required women to wear socially unacceptable bloomers, the tricycle only required women to wear a “loose costume and a broad hat.”

Tricycles were often built for two, allowed a wife and her husband a jaunt through the park on a lovely spring day. The tricycle, also known as the Safety bicycle (see Figure

Figure 3.2: A Woman on her Tricycle circa. 1895. Courtesy of Smith, *A Social History of the Bicycle*.

3.2), allowed women to ride out and about with their male escort and get a

little healthy exercise at the same time.

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

Advertisements of the bicycle in *Ladies Home Journal* from the 1890s illustrate an awareness of the growing popularity of the bicycle, as well as a need to persuade women to not be fearful of it. As it was still gaining momentum in the mid-1890s, the bicycle needed to be marketed in a way that did not scare women away from a mechanism that, when mishandled, could inflict bodily harm. An example of addressing tentative riders can be found in an advert by Sterling Cycle works, where the tagline for their bicycle is “Built like a Watch” in the January 1898 edition.<sup>85</sup> They describe their work ethic as “the same keen perception and perfect precision with which the parts of the finest watches are put together are show in the construction of every Sterling Bicycle; the wheel of strength.”<sup>86</sup> This advert emphasizes the reliability of their bicycles. By comparing them to watches, they draw a connection between how they are constructed of specific pieces, placed together in the one way for precise operating. For Sterling Cycle, the bicycle is not just a bipedal transport, but a machine specifically designed as reliably as the watch on someone’s wrist.

The Sterling bicycle advertisement is enlightening on numerous levels. Bicycle manufacturers marketed the tricycle as the woman’s bicycle. As mentioned previously, women rode it without making drastic alterations to their skirts, as the woman in the illustration shows. The advertisement itself promises that their tricycle is easy to use, light, and a lady can enjoy exercise “without the nervous strain and danger” and she “cannot fall, and you stop when you want to.”<sup>87</sup> She is completely in control of the mechanism beneath her. Control of their bicycle was very important for many

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<sup>85</sup> *Advertisement*. Sterling Works. *Ladies’ Home Journal*, January 1898.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>87</sup> *Advertisement*. Tinkham Cycle Co. *Ladies’ Home Journal* November 1898: 46. Print.

consumers, who did not trust these new, demonic methods of transportation and their various side effects.



Figure 3.3: '98 Mesinger Advertisement, courtesy of *Ladies' Home Journal*, May 1898.

Skeptics of the bicycle in the 1890s could purchase certain gadgets to alleviate the supposed side effects of cycling. The Gamble Shoulder Brace, which was “especially good for bicyclers” and “corrects stooping and gives freedom to the lungs,” supported the avid cyclist’s back and shoulders with steel springs.<sup>88</sup> Hulbert Bros. and Co. created a Women’s Saddle for the ‘98 Mesinger bicycle model.<sup>89</sup> This

advertisement (Figure 3.3) features a woman ecstatically and comfortably riding her bicycle without any alteration to her dress, with a personal testimony from frequent cyclist Mrs. A. M. C. Allen.

Gentlemen:- I have used your saddle for the past two years, riding over 10,000 miles in ‘96 and over 21,000 miles in ‘97, (mileage being filed semi-monthly with The Century Road Club of America). After trying nearly all the different makes, I find that the Mesinger is the only one I can use with the comfort or safety for long, hard, all-day rides.

Not only was Mrs. A. M. C. Allen able to cycle in accordance to her gender by wearing proper dress, but she had the choice to outfit her bicycle to be more accommodating to her needs as a cyclist.

<sup>88</sup> Advertisement. The Gamble Shoulder Brace, *Ladies Home Journal* December 1897: 44. Print.

<sup>89</sup> Advertisement. The Only Women’s Saddle ‘98 Mesinger. *Ladies Home Journal* May 1898: Back cover. Print.

## The Bicycle Contests Victorian Values

Even though there was a bicycle style, the tricycle and then later the drop frame, designated as the woman's bicycle, a woman rider's very position upon it during the Victorian era was a peculiar one. Fueled by Victorian morality and supported by medical authorities, opponents of the female cyclist worried about the threat to traditional definitions of gender roles. A typical woman did not belong on a bicycle like a man because they believed it was unnatural. Victorians were anxious bicycles could blur a woman's femininity and the female form. Patriarchal Victorian societal structures demanded self-policing diligence of gender performativity. When women and men did not perform to what their gender necessitated of them, Victorians feared social anarchy and chaos would ensue. This social anxiety resulted in literal policing of bodies. In 1887, a young Hattie Strage went for a leisurely bicycle ride into town. During her jaunt, Chicago police confronted and arrested her for disorderly conduct because she wore tights and a sweater which allowed her more mobility. The police apprehended Strage and charged her \$25- the equivalent of \$600 today- for her petty crime, even though all she did was try to exercise comfortably in clothing that allowed her body more freedom of movement.<sup>90</sup>

The inability to distinguish the female form fueled much of the social anxiety about women cycling for leisure. Garvey's study of contemporary advertisements examines how a woman's position on the bicycle needed to be feminine, and she could

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<sup>90</sup> Julia Christie-Robin, Belinda T. Orzada, and Dilia López-Gydosh. "From Bustles to Bloomers: Exploring the Bicycle's Influence on American Women's Fashion, 1880-1914." *Journal Of American Culture* 35, no. 4 (December 2012): 315-331. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost.

not cycle quickly because Victorians would perceive her as reckless and unlady-like.<sup>91</sup> On a bicycle, women's bodies were more difficult to control, thus women had more freedom to be independent and get exercise. Additionally, women who cycled needed to dress appropriately since their typical nineteenth century long skirts and corsets could not adequately allow them the flexibility to full exert themselves. In the 1890s, women wore costumes specific to cycling which, in the tamest sense, meant shortened skirts and a riding jacket. For example, historian

Robert A. Smith references a photo (Figure 3.4), for which the caption reads "Mrs. Marie Reideselle (right) won the *New York Herald's* prize for best bicycle costume for ladies- 1893" shows a socially acceptable cycling costume for women.<sup>92</sup> Mrs. Reideselle wears short skirts and a short riding jacket, gloves, and a hat. This outfit was practical, stylish, and still allowed her to conform to the feminine form.



Figure 3.4: Mrs. Marie Reideselle, courtesy of Smith, *A Social History of the Bicycle*, 86.

However, the most deviant women wore the ever-feared bloomers. The bloomers caused the most concern because the woman who wore them lost any sense of the feminine silhouette which the long skirts and corset defined. In fact, society viewed women in bloomers in the 1890s, even loose

<sup>91</sup> Ellen Gruber Garvey. *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s*. First. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. 15.

<sup>92</sup> Robert A. Smith, *A Social History of the Bicycle*. United States: American Heritage Press, 1972. (86)



ones which could have been misconstrued as skirts, as indecent. Victorians believed bloomers were not only a fashion faux pas, but immodest and even crude. Despite the social anxiety around women wearing pants like men and taking on masculine traits, bicycles influenced women's fashion and rational dress. The long skirts inhibited physical exertion, which was just as well because minimal movement was indicative of a Victorian woman's status.<sup>93</sup>

Much of the literature condemning women on bicycles reveals the Victorian anxiety that the bicycle would blur the decisive gender binary between male and female. The typically reserved Victorian society believed that increased muscle mass in women would make her "mannish." This would bring society down to a primitive state because deviant women wandered into the gray space between the predictably feminine and masculine. Historian Patricia Marks reflects that women building muscles and going about physical exercise was equated to the loss of feminine charm.<sup>94</sup> In a time where actors performed privilege through decreased physical activity, the woman's sphere was seen as a delicate and sacred one. The less energy a woman exerted, in the manner of housekeeping, child rearing, and any extraneous activity, the better and more prestigious her social status. Thus a woman defying all societal norms and not only riding bicycles, but adopting rational dress and wearing bloomers completely challenged these socially constructed "truths."<sup>95</sup> Rational dress and exercise deepened Victorian concern about

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<sup>93</sup>Joan N. Burstyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*. New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books, 1980.

<sup>94</sup> Marks, *The Adman in the Parlor*, 180.

<sup>95</sup> The rational dress movement, or dress reform, occurred primarily during the turn of the twentieth century when women began to understand their clothing as restrictive and limiting as they began to enter the workforce and need more use of their full range of motion and lung capacity. This movement targeted the corset and the practice of tight-lacing, as well as the normalization of women in pants rather than long, heavy skirts.

definite gender roles, fearing they blurred the female shape and made her gender less discernable from that of men.

While at its core this discussion about women on bicycles was derived from the Victorian desire to control the movement of the female body, there was also a societal anxiety about the female form and preserving the feminine silhouette.<sup>96</sup> Deviance from the typical delicate feminine characteristics was worrisome because Victorians feared she would lose sight of her role in society as a mother. However, healthy exercise was also a way to preserve a healthy, reproductive lifestyle. In her previously mentioned medical guide *Perfect Womanhood*, Dr. Mary R. Melendy wrote:

Do you desire to be strong? Then take exercise. Do you hope to retain your bloom and youthful appearance and still look charming in the eyes of your husband? Then take exercise. Do you wish to banish nervousness and low spirits? Then take exercise. There is nothing standing still in nature; if it were, creation would languish and die. There is perpetual motion.<sup>97</sup>

As a medical authority, Dr. Melendy's testimony to the importance of exercise for women illustrates an awareness for the aesthetic, emotional, and psychological benefits of physical activity for women. Regular exercise keeps women not only strong, a historically masculine trait, but also keeps women young and beautiful for their husbands and healthful for childbearing.

Melendy also praises and encourages women's movement. Bicycling was an easy way for all women to exercise. It was an efficient way to travel to the store, cheap to purchase, and easy to upkeep. Little did she know that encouraging women's physical movement would also mean encouraging their metaphorical movement outside of the traditional Victorian construction of motherhood and womanhood. Marks also remarks

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<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Mary R. Melendy. *Perfect Womanhood*, 1903, 333.

on the framework of the medically-reasoned fear of female athleticism interfering with women's traditional roles.

Both mental and physical exertion were believed to detract from womanly functions. Just as the educated girl was expected to unbalance her resources so that she would be unable, for example, to nurse her children successfully, the athletic girl was expected to grow either spare and thin or over muscular, but in any case misshapen.<sup>98</sup>

The woman's body was something to be isolated, preserved, and controlled. Echoing the Victorian fear of a stagnating population, this society "in crisis" at the end of the century heavily pressured women to perform succinctly "motherly" roles appropriate to their gender. Therefore, women who cycled too often and built up muscle mass transgressed

sacred gender boundaries and risked becoming a social taboo because their activities supposedly threatened the virility of the nation.

Marketing the bicycle to the Victorian audience also necessitated a certain diligence towards gender norms. In the January 1896 edition of *Ladies' Home Journal*, the company Dueber Grand advertised separate bicycles for Ladies and Gentlemen (Figure 3.5).<sup>99</sup> Most

importantly, the Ladies bicycle had a drop frame, to accommodate long skirts. In



Figure 3.5: Dubner Grand Bicycle Advertisement, courtesy of *Ladies' Home Journal*, January 1896.

additionally, the "his" and "hers" bicycle adverts are in a specifically women's magazine, typically bought by middle to upper class married women and mothers. The specific

<sup>98</sup> Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor*, 106.

<sup>99</sup> Advertisement. Dubner Watch Works, *Ladies' Home Journal*. January, 1896.

gendering of bicycles reveals an anxiety towards maintaining “proper” bicycling habits. Individuals in the marketing industry recognized independent cycling for women as unacceptable behavior, and made sure to advertise the bicycle so it would conform to exist within separate spheres. This allowed manufacturers to normalize female cyclists and to market the bicycle for willing female consumers.

Despite female riders flocking to bicycles, this new method of transportation was inherently against ideal Victorian femininity because it threatened sexual purity. Many of the medical claims against female bicycling, which were not unlike arguments for women riding side saddle rather than astride horses, were rooted in this fear of encouraging masturbation. As H.O. Carrington M.D. warned in an 1896 article in *The American Midwife*, “It would certainly not be desirable for a young woman to get her first ideas of her sex from a bicycle ride.”<sup>100</sup> This reflects an invested medical interest in the sexual “purity” of women at this time, and concern about masturbation. Garvey maintains, “Such claims are familiar from a period in which many discourses were cast in medical terms and issues as diverse as shoplifting and women's education were tied to reproductive health.”<sup>101</sup> This socially and historically constructed connection between a woman's health and her actions legitimized by medicine illustrates a societal, and specifically Victorian, urge to control female bodies. Naturally, concern about women cycling and venturing into the historically masculine sphere would detract from the social control and policing implemented and perpetuated through the philosophy of separate spheres.

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<sup>100</sup> Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor*, 106.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

Unbeknownst to these conservative Victorian voices speaking out against female bicyclists, the bicycle did threaten patriarchal Victorian society, yet in a way they did not necessarily anticipate. It challenged the physical movement out of the middle class woman's domestic sphere, rather than directly disturbing traditional sexuality. Exercise was a relatively new idea which evolved in this time period, which further medically supported women to ride. While feminists in the 1860s through 1890s did urge women to ride bicycles, they framed their assent in terms of proper motherhood, which was typical of first wave feminists making claims to expand women's spheres because of their moral positions as mothers and wives. This creates an interesting tension between trying to



Figure 3.6: Cartoon, courtesy of Smith, *A Social History of the Bicycle*, 86.

maintain gender norms associated with oppressive Victorian standards, but also urging women to exercise. In this cartoon from 1896 (Figure 3.6) two women wearing bicycle costumes discuss why the bicycle: *THE LEAN ONE-- “My doctor recommended bicycling to increase my weight”* *THE STOUT ONE-- “And my doctor recommended it to me to reduce mine”*<sup>102</sup>

This cartoon illustrated how doctors prescribed the bicycles for a whole spectrum of maladies. The most striking theme, however, places the bicycle as a vehicle to a

healthy lifestyle. While this cartoon constructs cycling as a way to both gain muscle and

<sup>102</sup> Smith, *A Social History of the Bicycle*, 86. The capitalization was from the original source.

shed pounds, the cartoonist depicted the bicycle as an important way to self-regulate one's health, thus placing more autonomy in women's hands. Doctors also realized that women needed exercise in order to have healthier and stronger babies, which also helped them frame the bicycle in terms of motherhood and gender roles and returned it to the private sphere of influence, which ultimately normalized female bicycle enthusiasts.

Female bicycle riders confounded many of those individuals with Victorian convictions at the turn of the twentieth century. While she was a woman, Victorians feared that female cyclists exhibited innate masculine characteristics, which they believed would be contagious and affect all women across the country. These female cyclists often hiked up their skirts or donned their riding pants, and took to the streets on their new-fangled machines. Their very actions created tensions between these progressive thoughts on gender, eventually what would become the New Woman, and Victorian ideology. The medical community feared that these young female cyclists would not only get the wrong idea about sex while they rode, but that they would become unfit mothers, too muscular distracted from proper mothering roles. Several women, however, pushed this limit and demonstrated to other women that they could in fact take up this new hobby and feel the dual benefits of physical exercise and autonomy.

### **The New Woman Transgressing Her Sphere**

Frances Willard became a bicycle advocate later than most avid cyclists at the age of fifty-three. In her memoir, she attests to the importance of the bicycle for women.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> The timing of this memoir is also extremely important for the purpose of this project because she wrote and published it in 1895, which is very early on not only in terms of my research, but also because the 1890s were when the bicycle was still relatively new. Her work was arguably groundbreaking because she was propagating a new industry for women. This memoir is an exemplary source of both rational health

Before the age of sixteen, Willard lived a very active lifestyle. Yet, as she writes in her memoir *A Wheel within a Wheel*, “From that time on I always realized and was obedient to the limitations thus imposed, though in my heart of hearts I felt their unwisdom even more than their injustice.”<sup>104</sup> From a young age, Willard understood that the sedentary life for women was not only unhealthy and against their best interests, it was about control of female bodies. Her memoir walks the reader through her process of learning how to ride a bicycle, while crafting metaphors of the bicycle to life. As a leader of the Temperance movement, Willard recalled that in order to be a proper bicycle rider, one needed perfect control and a clear mind. She wrote, “We all know the old saying, ‘Fire is a good servant, but a bad master.’ This is equally true of the bicycle: if you give it an inch-- nay, a hair-- it will take an ell-- nay, an evolution-- and you a contusion, or, like enough, a perforated knee cap.”<sup>105</sup> For Willard, mastering the bicycle was not only about health and control, but continually and consciously maintaining one’s health.

However, Willard’s poignant testimony illustrates the movement of the female body from the domestic sphere and focusing on the typically female sphere of work instead of being active in the public sphere. She looks at history, where only a few years previous were when women would never dream of leaving the house without a male escort, yet recognizes that times were changing, and independent female cyclists were free to ride into a new sphere, previously unavailable to them.<sup>106</sup> Women who cycled not

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benefits which come from bicycle riding and also larger metaphorical reasoning connecting the bicycle to autonomy.

<sup>104</sup> Frances Willard. *A Wheel Within a Wheel; A Woman’s Quest for Freedom with Some Reflections by the Way*. Bedford, Massachusetts: Applewood Books, 1895.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Willard, *A Wheel Within a Wheel*, 14-15.

only benefitted from the physical activity, but also exercised new found independence in space previously denied to them.

The economic side of the bicycle was also extraordinary. As Willard points out in her memoir, bicycles are cheaper to purchase than horses, not to mention less maintenance. This method of transport served as an equalizer; women from different socioeconomic backgrounds were able to buy bicycles and benefit from cycling.<sup>107</sup> It also required a certain degree of concentration to ride. Every burgeoning rider started their journey the same way Willard did: with multiple teachers and guides who helped hold her steady, though even they were still not enough to save her from the occasional tumble. Even men had the same wobbly first experience as Willard. The ability to share these same experiences on the same vehicle also shortened the differences between the sexes, bringing the riders regardless of gender to the same plane, in the same sphere.

The New Woman on the bicycle threatened sacred Victorian institutions such as marriage, which made her even more dangerous to the social structures. In a similar school of thought as Willard, mother and wife Ann Strong of Detroit wrote a piece in the *Minneapolis Tribune* during the 1890s speaking to the superiority of the bicycle over motherhood and matrimony, which most likely was an essay that represented all that anti-cycling Victorians feared women would embody after mastering the bicycle. She wrote:

As for health, I am certain that a great many old maids will hail the advent of the bicycle as a rare substitute for the prescription so many doctors administer; 'If you would only marry and have a family to care for your health would be alright.' Compare a wheel with a family in this respect. You can make your wheel tidy over night, and it never kicks off its shoes in the very last minute, never smears itself with molasses.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> During this time period, *Ladies' Home Journal* bicycle advertisements for different brands range bicycle prices from as low as \$25 to as high as \$80.

<sup>108</sup> Smith, *A Social History of the Bicycle*, 81.



This quote reflects tension in the transformation to the New Woman from Victorian ideals. According to Victorian gender norms, marriage and motherhood were the highest achievement a woman could attain. Yet Strong, who disdained those institutions, favored bicycle as a social awakening for women. Choice through autonomy appealed to her more strongly than an unhappy and unfulfilling marriage. Strong recognized the new opportunities offered to her through riding her bicycle as an alternative to oppressive gender roles. She questions the compulsivity of marriage as the only socially acceptable sexual outlet for women and exalts the bicycle as not only for one's health, but also as a way to attain a disassociation from what Emma Goldman would call an economically and subjugating social practice: marriage.

Another great superiority of the bicycle lies in the fact that you can always get rid of it when you wish. You can roll it in and stand it up in a corner, and there it stays... When it gets shabby or old you can dispose of it and get you a new one without shocking the entire community.<sup>109</sup>

Essentially, Strong made the claim of the benefit of independence. The bicycle was such a groundbreaking instrument for women especially because for the first time, it normalized independent female movement. Additionally, as an unhappily married woman, Strong makes an allusion from the disposability of an old bicycle to divorce. She longed to leave her husband with the ease of throwing out an old bicycle. As the New Woman arose out of Victorian ideals from the 1890s through the 1930s, her movement on the bicycle without an escort became less peculiar and she could move about independently, much as Mrs. Strong desired most.

The New Woman was mobile, not in a particularly feminine form, and able to move at her own pace into public space. Also, her threat to typical familial structures

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

increased as she gained more options. The bicycle gave her more autonomy to make choices about where she chose to place her body. This ability to choose distinguishes the New Woman from the Victorian Lady. Marks writes, "Importantly, [the bicycle] extended her sphere across the threshold, for in loosening her stays and dividing her

skirts, the New Woman took possession of her own movements and achieved a measure of self-confidence that carried her into the twentieth century."<sup>110</sup> She directly credits this movement to the not only the popularity, but the normalization of the bicycle as a mode of transportation.

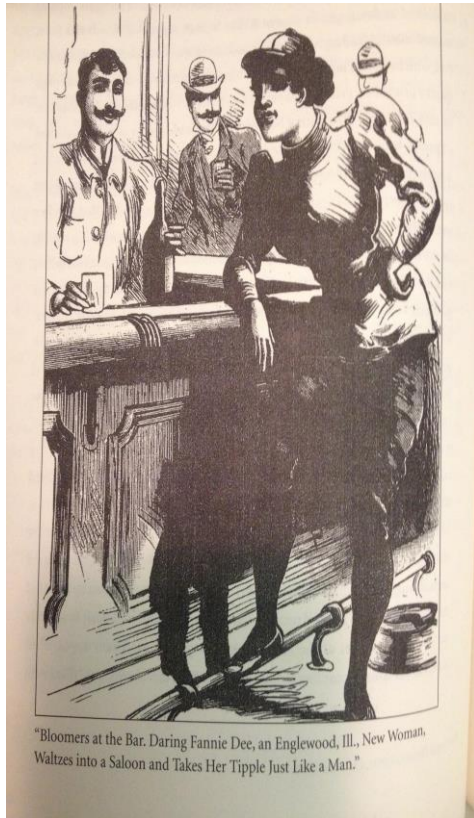


Figure 3.7: "Bloomers at the Bar," courtesy of Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited*, 50.

An early representation of the New Woman appeared in the *National Police Gazette* in 1895 (Figure 3.7). The magazine was famous for showing lewd images of women participating in masculine activities, such as cycling and

drinking, and this particular cartoon was no

different. While the bicycle-riding New

Woman was not overtly sexualized, the *National Police Gazette* depicted her as a

laughing stock who was "singing and screaming."<sup>111</sup> The short article calls this

caricature of the New Woman "Fannie Dee" and notes that riding her bicycle and

<sup>110</sup> Marks, *Adman in the Parlor*, 201.

<sup>111</sup> "Bloomers at the Bar," *College Humor*, 1895, in Patterson, Martha H. *The American New Woman Revisited; A Reader, 1894-1930*. New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2008.

bloomers did not suffice for her. “But a mere ride on a wheel in bloomers was too pacific for Fannie. The old man had more liberties. He could stand up at the bar and drink. Why not also the new woman?”<sup>112</sup> For Fannie, cycling and bloomers were only the gateway into more typically masculine endeavors in masculine space, such as speaking too loudly, cracking crass jokes, and ordering her own alcoholic drink. Perhaps the most revealing part in this piece is the New Woman as a contagion. She recruits Mrs. Carey, who shocks her husband with her whiskey and attempts to emulate her new friend, Fannie. While this piece was not overtly condemning of the New Woman and more of a mockery of her caricature, it reflected anxieties derived from the incorrectly performed gender roles. Fannie blurs the gender boundary, carries herself in a masculine way, and persuades other women to follow her example, all because the bicycle provided a window into those other opportunities not afforded to women.

What Frances Willard, Ann Strong, and Fannie Dee had in common was not only a profound appreciation for the bicycle, but a new consciousness of opportunity. Through cycling, these women accessed healthy exercise, dress reform, and newfound freedom in choice and independence. The numerous debates surrounding every element of women and bicycles together reflects a certain tension in the clash between Victorian ideals and the New Woman figure about proper performative gender. When the bicycle was on the rise in the early 1890s, the first conversations surrounding this new mechanism were regarding how to accommodate femininity; how can a lady also access this method of transportation without being masculine and unseemly? As women moved away from the tandem rides with their husbands and rode independently, outcries from

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<sup>112</sup> Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited*, 51.

the medical and religious communities reflected an anxiety about the feminine body itself. While both of these communities were concerned with sexual purity and morality, the physical movement of the female body confused the voices of dissent. Since Victorians maintained society through methods of self-policing, a confusion over how to retain Victorian standards of proper femininity confounded people from all aspects of society. When deviant women adopted cycling and bloomers, there was a genuine fear that all would erupt in chaos and national impotence. While the bicycle's promise of opportunity and choice allowed women to physically move into uncharted territory.

## **Chapter IV** **Bluestockings in Vogue;** **Women's Higher Education from 1890-1930**

As a response to the chilly reception new female students- then commonly referred to as “coeds”- received from their male counterparts at coeducational colleges, Bryn Mawr president M. Carey Thomas stated "Everything exists for women students and is theirs by right not by favor."<sup>113</sup> As the president of the prestigious women's college from 1894 through 1922, she advocated a woman's right to an equal education, regardless of whether she attended a coeducational or all-female institution. From 1890 through 1930, many young women entering higher institutions of learning would need to heed these words as encouragement to continue their course, despite the critics. Many male students and historically masculine institutions rejected and discouraged women from adopting a more masculine collegiate curriculum.<sup>114</sup> In this era of the cultural shift from Victorian morality to the Progressive era, these women were pioneers in their own right; they ventured into the unknown, masculine territory commonly known as college.

While many women attended institutions for higher learning since the early nineteenth century, the courses were either offered at all-female seminaries or followed a curriculum that the educators catered specifically to the feminine sphere of influence. However, in the Progressive era, women saw monumental shifts in how American society perceived women's roles in private and public spaces. In 1870, one percent of Americans went to college and 20 percent of those Americans were women. Thirty years later in

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<sup>113</sup> Rosalind Rosenberg. *Divided Lives; American Women in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1992, 26. For more information on M. Carey Thomas, see her papers in the Bryn Mawr College Library's digital collection <http://www.brynmawr.edu/library/speccoll/guides/thomas.shtml>.

<sup>114</sup> A typically masculine curriculum comprised of classes in the hard sciences, mathematics, literature, and government. These classes were classified as masculine in the way they prepared men to be active citizens.

1900, four percent of Americans went to college, 36 percent of whom were women. Additionally, it is important to note that women outnumbered men studying at liberal arts at this time because the liberal art curriculum gave women more options within their sphere of influence.<sup>115</sup> During the 1920s, female college graduates tripled, and women who went on to earn their PhDs quadrupled.<sup>116</sup> However, even though female students were one quarter of the student body at universities, they took typically feminine courses and the majority of these women remained unmarried.<sup>117</sup>

After earning their degrees, female college graduates felt very limited as to what they could do. Among the professions, only five percent of doctors were women, and less than one percent of lawyers were women. Less than three percent of women graduates entered business. Since many avenues were closed to them, many women who had higher education behind them became journalists and writers.<sup>118</sup> As the most traditionally feminine option, sixty percent of female college graduates went on to teach because those were some of the only jobs available. Less than ten percent of female college graduates went on to graduate school.<sup>119</sup> Additionally, in part inspired by Jane Addam's work at Hull House, by 1910, women comprised of the majority of students pursuing social work.

The burgeoning popularization of women attending universities, as well as changes in the curriculum at many institutions, reflected this shift from male dominated academia to an influx of female students and the normalization of coeducational colleges. More and more young women started to consider collegiate studies as more than a

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<sup>115</sup> Rosenberg, *Divided Lives*, 26.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

Victorian aspiration to perfect their ability as idyllic mothers and wives. Rather, many women pursued careers in education, journalism, medicine, and business. They may have faced obstacles upon graduation, but their exposure to independent living and the expansion of their horizons brought these women and their supporters into direct conflict with those who still ascribed to Victorian conventions regarding the women's role in American society. This tension was a result of evolving ideas about women's confined proper roles in society, but also simultaneously exacerbated by a growing number of women entering the workforce and moving into public space.

Victorian ideology perpetuated the separation of spheres. Women, as the moral heads of the middle-class home, were to be pure and innocent. Most importantly, Victorian society considered women to be above the harshness of the working and political space which men conducted their lives in, in order to create a safe haven detached from grubby reality. This sentiment echoes in Victorian college curriculum, encouraging women to attend institutions of higher education so that they could be better mothers and wives. However, female students' experiences even at institutions which limited their ability for consideration of complete equality to their male counterparts, allowed them the potential and opportunity for independent thinking and living.

In this chapter, I first consider the historiography of American women's education from 1890-1930. Then I provide a history of women's higher education, in order to provide some historical context for this clash of shifting gendered perceptions of the role of American women and how that thinking translated into education. I examine course catalogues, advice literature, and representations of women's education in popular media. Additionally, the way in which Victorians and progressives framed education reveals

how Victorian educators and critics argued against women pursuing a typically masculine education. I argue that this anxiety, and the implications of women pursuing higher education challenged Victorian gender roles and the politics of public space.

Higher education for women began as a means for burgeoning middle-to-upper-middle class wives and mothers to learn refinement in the arts so they could serve as moral guardians for their children and intelligent companions for their husbands. Over time, women's higher education evolved into a way for young women to experience independence, autonomy, and to be surrounded by like-minded young women. The mutual reinforcement of the changing goals of women and the growing desire to go to an institution of higher education changed the role of women and allowed them to challenge historically masculine space. Revealed through anxieties expressed by conservative thinkers, this challenge to Victorian conventions upset the status quo and led to many individuals asking the "Woman Question."<sup>120</sup> The common phrase "knowledge is power" continued to ring true for these pioneering women. In order to be more active in society, women needed access to this knowledge and higher education was a stepping stone for access into this new sphere of influence. Gendered curriculums, albeit initially limited to typically feminine occupations like type-writing, music, and art, were the foot in the door.

In the early nineteenth century, even as educational opportunities for women increased, pioneer female educators had different conceptions of how to frame women's higher education. "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College: Religion, Class, and

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<sup>120</sup> The "Woman Question" originated from Western countries at the end of the nineteenth century during the changing role of women. It asked, "What do with women?" as industrialization and Victorian conventions changed the construction of the home and familial dynamics. For clarification and a more in depth explanation, please refer to "Chapter I: Introduction."



Curriculum in the Educational Visions of Catharine Beecher and Mary Lyon, ”<sup>121</sup>  
historian Andrea L. Turpin argues scholars all too often conflate the educational ideas of female higher education philosophical pioneers Emma Willard, Catherine Beecher and Mary Lyon. Instead, we should understand the nuances of their ideologies behind education. Emma Willard popularized the idea of women's higher education, while Beecher - founder of the Hartford Female Seminary - and Lyon did more of the realistic groundwork to make these visions actual.<sup>122</sup> Turpin examines their upbringings and separate ideologies in order to compare them as the founders of women’s college education and curriculums in order to explore these nuances more thoroughly by looking at their own respective writings and books, and the curriculums of their schools and their legacies. Turpin’s work explores the complexity in the foundation of women’s higher education and illustrates the early Victorian tensions in maintaining gender roles, despite women occupying this public space.

Many young women who sought a higher education often met several obstacles, such as the limited types of course available to her, which either complicated what type of collegiate course the school would offer, or their opportunities after graduation. In her journal article “A Means of Honorable Support: Art and Music in Women’s Education in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” social historian Margaret A. Nash questions earlier historians who have previously analyzed these pursuits as simply "women's education" and as a way to perpetuate the status quo in the mid-nineteenth century. She engages

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<sup>121</sup> Andrea L. Turpin. “The Ideological Origins of the Women’s College: Religion, Class, and Curriculum in the Educational Visions of Catharine Beecher and Mary Lyon.” *History of Education Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (May 2010), 133–58.

<sup>122</sup> In the College of Wooster *Index* of 1890/92, there were only two sororities and a literary society listed where women were the primary members and leadership of the organizations. They called the literary society simply Willard and the *Index* states that they named the club for Emma Willard, “the friend of college women.” *College of Wooster Course Catalogue*. Wooster, Ohio, 1883-1908.

with literature from the time and her contemporaries to show nuance and how women studying art and music at the time allowed the women potential for employment or independence.<sup>123</sup> Historians contend that ornamental or "pursuing ornamental skills" referred to a woman's education in music and the arts, but Nash argues that teachers, students, and educators used it synonymously to all academic subjects.<sup>124</sup> She also argues that this access to education through music and art expanded a woman's opportunities for autonomy and career choices. This is especially a possibility in the mid-nineteenth century when many occupations were closed to women.

By the Victorian Era, education for men and women reflected socially constructed gender norms. In her book *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*, social historian Joan N. Burstyn focuses more specifically on how women pursued higher education in the Victorian era in the United States, and how the culture of the time impacted how and why they navigated historically masculine space.<sup>125</sup> She connects education to class and argues that formal Victorian higher education was not groundbreaking. It paralleled men's education, but it helped the sexes better prepare for their lives in separate spheres. In this era, education for women focused at educating women on achieving "ideal" womanhood and being better administrators within their own spheres.

Similarly, social historian John Rury explored the difficulties educators faced when preparing women for the labor market in his article "Vocationalism for Home and

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<sup>123</sup> Margaret A. Nash "A Means of Honorable Support: Art and Music in Women's Education in the Mid-Nineteenth Century." *History of Education Quarterly*, Historical Period: ca 1851 to ca 1900, 53, no. 1 (February 2013): 45–63.

<sup>124</sup> Nash, "A Means of Honorable Support," 48.

<sup>125</sup> Joan N. Burstyn. *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*. New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books, 1980.

Work: Women's Education in the United States, 1880-1930."<sup>126</sup> In primary school classrooms, many educators believed in the coeducation of boys and girls. As they aged, however, young men and women had different and separate paths ahead of them, thus teachers and professors assembled women's higher education curricula based on gendered vocation. For example, women's curricula typically featured courses in music performance and art. Rury analyzes the different avenues women took before 1930 and how these roads were different aspects of a holistic idea of women's education. He argues that examining these separate facets of women's education would help historians understand the importance of vocational training and school reform at the beginning of the twentieth century.

As the rate of young women seeking higher education after 1900 rose significantly from the end of the nineteenth century, their new roles in a changing American society brought the very idea of "womanhood" into question. In her book *Divided Lives; American Women in the Twentieth Century*, historian Rosalind Rosenberg analyzes the multifaceted lives of women who entered the public sphere to either work or go to school, yet still had to contend with perceiving their lives in terms of femininity.<sup>127</sup> She examines statistics regarding the activities of women and studies on the subject from about 1900 in order to analyze how women maneuvered in this relatively new space. From these results and analysis, she found that there is no easy way to simplify the women's experiences, and this era of women's role transience shows that not only were

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<sup>126</sup> John L. Rury. "Vocationalism for Home and Work: Women's Education in the United States, 1880-1930." *History of Education Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 21-44.

<sup>127</sup> Rosalind Rosenberg. *Divided Lives; American Women in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1992.

women's lives divided between the public and private, but by several factors such as class and race.

Many historians write on Victorian education, or on Progressive era- education. It is my aim to bridge these two narratives to see which societal changes facilitated this shift. My research asks why and how the aim at all-female and coeducational institutions of higher learning altered the typically feminine curriculums, and what the cultural and societal implications of the changing aims of female higher education had on the young women involved, as well as their critics. I argue that the gradual popularization of women's higher education in universities and seminaries from 1890 through 1930 revealed anxiety surrounding women's roles and bodies resulting from Victorian dogma. As more women entered institutions for higher learning, they broke into higher occupations. Similarly, as more opportunities opened to women, more women attended university. These two changes in women's lives occurred across the Western world because of the other, and their causal relationship reinforced and perpetuated this cycle of new opportunities in the public sphere for women. These new opportunities in education and the workplace propelled women into historically masculine space, where they forced society to confront rigid Victorian gender normativity and subsequently changed the course of history.

In this chapter, I first provide a brief history of women's higher education in the United States, beginning in the early-to-mid nineteenth century, in order to provide context for the Victorian conventions which shaped a particularly gendered education for women. I then discuss how Victorian conventions influenced attitudes towards women's higher education, and then how educators and students approached their course while

perpetuating this ideology. Lastly, I examine why the educated New Woman was not only a threat to Victorian conventions, but how her physical presence in historically masculine space, higher education, forced her to confront anxiety about the potential of the female body in a sphere allegedly “unnatural” to her.

### **History of Women’s Education**

Victorians based higher education for women on the separate sphere ideology. According to this set of rules and regulations, women conducted themselves within the home, schoolhouse, and church where they interacted with other women while their husbands, fathers, and brothers operated in the workplace where they dealt with financial and political rhetoric not appropriate for the home setting.<sup>128</sup> In the throes of industrialization, the workplace for many families moved from privately-owned businesses into factories or offices, where the male heads of each family went to for work. As the men left, women stayed at home and the status of the home elevated to a safe haven removed from the workplace, where women were the keepers of innocence and morality.

This ideology of separate spheres shaped the curriculum of Victorian female higher education. Educators in line with Victorian conventions believed that studying music and art helped women learn grace, manners, and elegance. The purpose of women’s education was to prepare her for her future social life. Victorian educators and etiquette deemed courses in collegiate mathematics and the hard sciences too rigorous

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<sup>128</sup> For more information on separate spheres: "Gender: Separate Spheres for Men and Women." American Eras. 1997. *Encyclopedia.com*. (January 31, 2015).<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-2536601050.html>.

and unimportant for women's well-rounded educations.<sup>129</sup> Additionally, the construct of Republican Motherhood perpetuated separate sphere ideology because it encouraged women to pursue education so they could provide an adequate education for their children. Women had the very important occupation of educating their sons to be properly active members of the American democratic society. His mother taught him rudimentary arithmetic, literacy, and how to participate in civilized society in order to prepare him for his duty as a citizen. Thus, they needed education, yet Victorian ideology limited women's potential to go further than an elementary level in mathematics and science, and encouraged full knowledge in "ornamental" studies such as art and music.

However, there are several women who led the charge to encourage higher education for women which was not centered on the typically feminine sphere. Emily Davies, who began her crusade for women's higher education in the mid-nineteenth century, wanted women to have to opportunity to take university examinations, and initially this was to measure the effectiveness of female teachers and governesses. Davies, with the help of the NAPSS (National Association for the Promotion of Social Science) and powerful men, persuaded Cambridge to allow women to take exams as long as they could take measures to "protect the modesty of the young women." The university authorities made this process permanent in 1867 and this opportunity was a breakthrough for women seeking higher education.<sup>130</sup> Women were able to improve their teaching abilities. They began organizing lectures and taking exams afterwards, and

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<sup>129</sup> Nash, "A Means of Honorable Support," 48-49.

<sup>130</sup> Burstyn, *Victorian Education*, 25.

received a statement illustrating the standard they had reached.<sup>131</sup> Davies instituted the first college parallel to a male college where women had the same coursework and timeline to complete it in 1869 at Hitchin to prove that women were capable of the same intellectual levels as their male counterparts.<sup>132</sup>

Emma Willard, Catherine Beecher, and Mary Lyon were major thinkers in the progression of women's higher education. Beecher founded Hartford Female Seminary in 1823, Western Female Institute in 1833 and Milwaukee Female College in 1850.<sup>133</sup> Even though none of these institutions lasted very long, she also wrote the manual "A Treatise on Domestic Economy" in 1841 and advocated women's education and the ideal of domesticity. She also tried to place a cross-cultural emphasis on the necessity of educating the younger generation, in order to connect across classes.<sup>134</sup> Mary Lyon taught at female seminaries throughout the 1820s and 1830s and opened Mount Holyoke Female Seminary (which would later be called Mount Holyoke Female College) in 1837. Lyon wanted to make higher education accessible to poorer women, and advocated professional training like homemaking and teaching. She also advocated women learning the same liberal arts curriculum as men, yet with gender-specific extra-curriculum courses.<sup>135</sup>

Many colleges opened their doors to women in the late nineteenth century because they were under pressure by surrounding schools. Since teaching was a nearly exclusively female occupation, many schools wanted prospective teachers to train at an

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 141-142.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

institution of higher learning because they wanted better high school educators.<sup>136</sup> As more schools embraced education in the fine arts after the 1850s, there was a new demand for teachers who could teach English, history, geography, along with music and art. This demand came from academies, seminaries, high schools and normal schools after 1840.<sup>137</sup> While this course for education did not fully equate women's collegiate course to that of men because it was still within the female sphere of influence, it allowed women increased access to higher education and a push beyond the gender boundaries.

### **Victorian Perspectives on Women's Education**

The Victorian lack of distinction between ignorance and innocence heavily influenced their construction of women's education. In her book *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*, historian Joan N. Burstyn writes that in the Victorian era:

Both men and women began to behave according to a code of social respectability that entailed repression in language and actions. Only through ignorance (referred to as innocence), it was believed, could women truly be preserved from the dangers of vice, for to have knowledge that something existed was to savour its quality, as Adam and Eve had learned in the garden of Eden.<sup>138</sup>

Victorians were enamored with perceived innocence which women were meant to maintain and perpetuate within the home. In contemporary rhetoric, we find that the absence of knowledge, or ignorance, is not the same as innocence. Also, heightened importance of "innocence" at this time also illustrates a power dynamic in terms of knowledge. The men went out into the world, worked, and had a voice in politics and finances, while women stayed at home and maintained it as a retreat for their husbands.

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<sup>136</sup> Rosenberg, *Divided Lives*, 26.

<sup>137</sup> Nash, "A Means of Honorable Support," 52.

<sup>138</sup> Burstyn, *Victorian Education*, 34.



The portrayal of women as morally above the fray and gritty real world was just as oppressive as the physical corsets around their waists. In their homemaking of tranquility and consumerism, women did not have the opportunity to access knowledge. Therefore, without access to the real world fears, truths, and politics, women had limited ways to empower themselves with knowledge and have a legitimate voice and autonomy in their homes.

As women's higher education began and increased popularity after the mid-nineteenth century, the institutions still needed to reflect gender norms. In its founding years, Mount Holyoke Seminary- an all-female institution since its founding in 1837- believed that they conducted themselves as one large family when they wrote a historical sketch of the college in 1878. This idea of working within a familial, rather than institutional, structure was still considered proper and familiar to these students in the domestic sphere of influence, and the course work reflected this philosophy of working together as a family. Even though the young women took courses in algebra, trigonometry, biology, chemistry, Greek, Latin, literature, and political history, the curriculum still allotted time for honing domestic skills. For example, the Mount Holyoke administration required the students to complete about one hour of domestic work a day, in the form of cleaning their living quarters and other areas across campus. This began as a way to reduce costs and help the students be a little active and independent. However, the administration learned that there were hidden, long-term benefits to this method of penny-pinching.

One sees the domestic affairs of a family of three hundred smoothly and successfully carried on, day after day and year after year, without servants; she can hardly fail to receive such an impression of what system, co-operation, and punctual activity can effect as would not readily be gained in any other way.

Moreover, since she has something to do for everyone else, and every one does something for her, she naturally falls into a habit of considering the general good.<sup>139</sup>

Even at all-female institutions like Mount Holyoke, learning how to be a diligent student and domestic wife were dual benefits during the nineteenth century in women's higher education. While learning about general goodness and cooperation were not negative aspects of a holistic education, they were specifically gendered for the feminine sphere of influence. Young men in university would never have been expected to do their own housekeeping because they attended long-established institutions and domestic work did not exist within the masculine sphere of influence and was thusly irrelevant to their studies.

In the late nineteenth century, educators continued to usher their female students into a gendered curriculum, and this trend was not restricted to single-sex colleges. In the College of Wooster Course Catalogue in 1883, the registrar described the music department and degree:

The necessity of musical instruction, for the benefit of particularly of many young women who desire to secure the privileges of the college courses without sacrificing the advantages of a musical education, has impressed itself from year to year, with increasing force, upon the friends of the Institution. The advantage, also, to young men of securing knowledge of the elements of music as an incidental study, is very great.<sup>140</sup>

Victorians believed that pursuing a degree in music and the arts optimized a woman's chances to enhance her future household. An education in the arts heightened women's abilities to make the home a lively and happy retreat from the realities of the public sphere. For male students at Wooster, it would merely serve as "incidental study" on the

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<sup>139</sup> *Historical Sketch of Mount Holyoke Seminary*. Springfield, Mass.: Clark W. Bryan and Company, Printers, 1878. 20.

<sup>140</sup> College of Wooster. *Course Catalogue*. Wooster, Ohio, 1883, 52.

way to their bachelor degrees. Historian Margaret Nash explores the nuance of the agency of these women pursuing particularly and historically constructed “feminine” studies. She argues that extensive study in music and the arts, however gendered, allowed women access to more opportunities they would not have previously attained without a further study of “ornamental” courses. Yet, the above excerpt from the Wooster Catalogue addresses the typically feminized nature of the study of music, even though it was of course available and legitimate for men to pursue the course as well. The term “sacrifice” is peculiar in this instance, as it acknowledges that the women who attend the typical collegiate course at Wooster also put, what Nash writes many historians would refer to as, “ornamental” studies, on hold due to other courses available to them. Additionally, the last sentence which justifies male students pursuing the typically feminine course also highlights the gendering of courses in the years of burgeoning women’s education.

Despite the gendered curriculum at the College of Wooster- a coeducational institution from its founding in 1866- the institution still desired to provide their female students an equal opportunity to independence and success after graduation. While they presented the college as an alternative to traditional womanly educational pursuits, their mission statement for coeducation remains safely within separate spheres.

Superior advantages are offered to earnest young women who desire *thorough intellectual culture*, and who prefer advanced education to merely artistic or social accomplishments. *Those who expect to teach, to engage in missionary work, for to prepare themselves for any womanly sphere of usefulness or self-support*, may find advantageous training in our courses of study, which are open, *without distinction*, to members of either sex.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Italics were in the original text. College of Wooster. *Course Catalogue*. Wooster, Ohio, 1883, 16-17.

This excerpt from the Course Catalogue illustrates how even this co-educational experience for women was still set within the confines of the Victorian woman's sphere of influence. While the university impresses that any course of study they teach and made "thorough intellectual culture" available for women, the institution framed the utility of their education within the parameters of "any womanly sphere of usefulness or self-support." This language directly echoes the sentiment of separate spheres.

In contrast, Smith College, a historically all-female institution, operated under a different philosophy: "This College is not intended to fit woman for any particular sphere or profession, but to perfect her intellect by the best methods which philosophy and experience suggest, so that she may be better qualified to enjoy her work in life, whatever this work may be."<sup>142</sup> The language here differs from the College of Wooster's because Smith did not assume a particular postgraduate path for their students. While Wooster explicitly stated that their institution would benefit female students pursuing anything within the "womanly sphere of usefulness," the purposefully vague language in Smith's philosophy for women's education allowed their students to envision a life beyond the womanly sphere. The institution did not specifically ordain the intellect gained from their course to aid women in their sphere of influence, but to simply aid their lives as American citizens. Smith's vague language proposes more open-ended futures for women and their female students. Whether the student re-entered the domestic sphere or literally walked into public spaces and historically masculine occupations, the collegiate course exposed female students to modern ideas and competitive education.

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<sup>142</sup> Smith Class Book, Smith College, 1897, 96.

## **Women's Education as a Challenge to Heteronormativity**

As many critics of educated women feared, higher education exposed women to new ideas about marriage, sex, and their roles in their feminine sphere of influence. These new questions and women defying their allegedly natural orientation towards domesticity made Victorians worried about the shifting of the gender binary. The decisive binaries Victorians perpetuated constructed deviance from the ascribed gender and sexuality norms as a taboo. For the Victorians, challenging heterosexuality equated to challenging heteronormative gender roles because lesbian relationships, when pursued, disturbed the Victorian family structure and displaced the man's role, thus allowing women more room to take on masculine characteristics.

Anxiety about sexuality manifested in anxiety about gender, and all-female institutions reinforced concern over the same-sex sexual relationships. Female same-sex relationships were more or less ignored in the Victorian era, and the same was true for preceding eras. It was very common for women to be physically affectionate in public, and to share beds at night. While to contemporary scholars, these actions are ways to express romantic love, homosocial relationships between women were commonplace. According to historian Rosalind Rosenberg, of 22,000 mostly college educated women who attended both co-educational and same-sex institutions in 1900, fifty percent of women who never married and thirty percent of those who married later in their lives reported to have had "intense emotional relationships with other women," and half of each group said that those relationships were physical.<sup>143</sup> While discerning contemporary understandings of lesbian relationships from the historical record is difficult because the

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<sup>143</sup> Rosenberg, *Divided Lives*, 34.

social and historical construct of labeling sexual preference is a more recent phenomenon, these findings are significant for several reasons.<sup>144</sup> Even if the relationships Rosenberg describes were not romantic, they illustrate a trend of deviance from normative gender roles and heterosexuality. These “intense emotional relationships with other women,” physical or not, allowed the women movement to question existing power hierarchies. If a woman could live financially independent of a man and could be masculine in her own right, she would upset the entire Victorian set of conventions outlining gendered experiences.

Attending university posed as another avenue for these young women to seek independence. While this change of women moving away from parental supervision widened the possibility for increased women’s sexual freedom, at the same time it also jeopardized female same-sex relationships, making them much more difficult to have and more deviant to pursue. Until around 1920, female same-sex relationships were a fairly common occurrence at all-female institutions. Students saw “smashing” as nearly normalized at places like Smith and Vassar. Smashing, as Alice Stone Blackwell described in 1882, occurred when women lusted and courted and became jealous of one another “like a man.”<sup>145</sup> Even though this reference dates to before this shift into taboo occurred, it reveals anxiety about how sexual deviance connected very easily to gender deviance. Gender deviance, as enacted sexual deviance where the woman takes on characteristics “like a man” completely undermines the function of Victorian philosophy.

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<sup>144</sup> The undefined and allegedly asexual homosocial relationships between women of the nineteenth century were referred to as Boston Marriages. For more on the history of Boston Marriages, refer to the book: Esther D. Rothblum, and Kathleen A. Brehony, eds. *Boston Marriages: Romantic but Asexual Relationships among Contemporary Lesbians*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 2014.

<sup>145</sup> Neil Miller. *Out of the Past; Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present*. New York: Alyson Books, 2006.

Thus, when these middle class white women had access to resources where they could have a stable occupation and education, their critics' voiced concern of destroying gender dynamics as they stepped into new spaces with acquired masculine tendencies. Historian Neil Miller writes "The tradition of female romantic friendships, combined with women's growing economic independence, created the possibility of two women living together in a primary relationship without men."<sup>146</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, new opportunities for women created these openings for same-sex romantic relationships, along with education, and the lack of awareness that women were, indeed, sexual beings. The looming threat that educated, successful women could live happily in a home without a masculine presence threatened Victorian contemporaries and ushered in a new age.

Even within heterosexual relationships, higher education altered how many female students perceived courting and marriage. As society began to accept the normalization of women's collegiate studies, data from the time shows a definite change in marriage practices of educated women. Marriage rates decreased for women during the 1890s. At the turn of the century, rates of married educated women increased because the influence of the flapper, automobile, and increased enrollment at universities decreased supervision and gave them more agency. Many women who pursued social work after graduation did not marry because they were skeptical of the institution of marriage.<sup>147</sup> Additionally, ninety-two percent of co-eds admitted to "petting" and for a third of these co-eds, petting led to sex.<sup>148</sup> New technologies in the 1920s led to an

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<sup>146</sup> Miller, *Out of the Past*, 53.

<sup>147</sup> Rosenberg, *Divided Lives*, 32.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

increase in extramarital sexual activity among co-eds. For example, in 1930 a judge in Muncie, Indiana declared the automobile a “house of prostitution on wheels” because of the secluded space a parked car offered for unchaperoned encounters.<sup>149</sup> However, the bicycle, automobile, and this shift from Victorian ideals to the New Woman changed how middle class families conceptualized courting. Gentlemen callers could whisk their lady loves on whirlwind dates on bicycles or automobile rides, far from the prying parental eyes and ears of the Victorian parlor room where their parents met and became familiar.

These statistics about women’s extramarital sexual activities illustrate the exact concern of those who spoke out against women attending universities or some other institution of higher learning. This higher learning would distract these young, impressionable women of ripe marrying age from their duties as Victorian women, and corrupt their sexuality and innocence. Examining the shift in marriage rates from 1900-1920 illustrates a dramatic change in how educated women perceived marriage and intimate relationships with men. As the head of morality at home, women of the Victorian age were not meant to ever question their given role as wives and mothers. This decline in marriage rates for college educated women reflects a disconnect from previous philosophies of the expectations of women and a burgeoning sense of independence not previously seen for middle class women.

In this cartoon, originally found in *College Humor* in 1923, one dancer says to her friend “Say I wisht I had a college education like you. Mr. Gest pays you \$20 more’n ys

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For clarification, “petting” was a term coined in the 1920s and referred to displays of affection such as embracing, kissing, and playful touching. Individuals hosted “petting parties” on and off college campuses and were scandalous and seen as a massive affront to modesty and Victorian contemporaries.

<sup>149</sup> Rosenberg, *Divided Lives*, 92.



just cause you can dance so naughty and drink whiskey in the big scene realistically.”<sup>150</sup>

With the apt title “Professional Training,” (see Figure 4.1) this cartoon plays on the parental anxiety of the time of these young women, future mothers and wives, going off to college to engage in unsavory and immodest activities such as petting parties.

This cartoon affirms this fear that women’s college education would prepare women for nothing but dancing and promiscuity with men, with or without marriage.

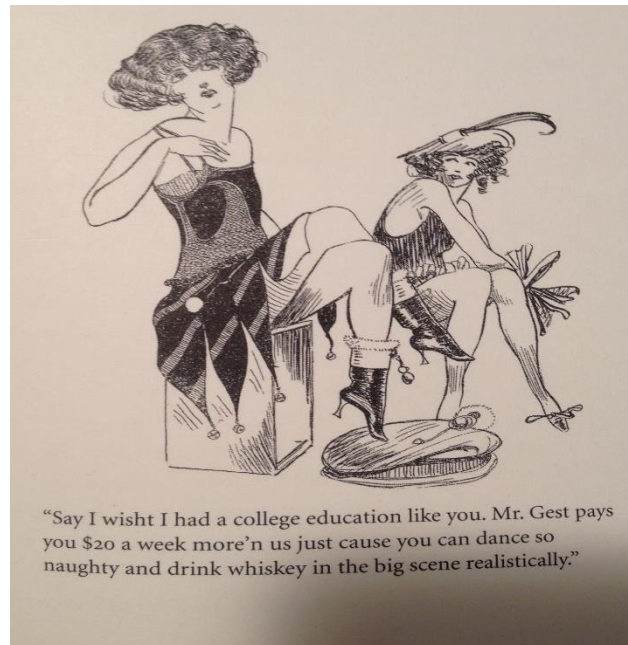


Figure 4.1: *College Humor Cartoon*, courtesy of Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited*, 179.

Throughout this period of change, the institutions themselves and the educators placed an emphasis on the supervision of the young women students, in order to protect normative Victorian standards of gender. When the College of Wooster opened the new dormitory Hoover Cottage for women in 1897, the course catalogue reassures the parents and students that the house was “heated by steam, provided with all modern conveniences, with a room for gymnastic exercises, with instruments for musical practice, superintended by a competent matron, and directly under the care of the Faculty, has now been provided [...]”<sup>151</sup> The catalogues said nothing about the accommodations for men, yet this expressed concern for the whereabouts and security of these young,

<sup>150</sup> “Professional Training.” *College Humor*, Summer 1923, 18.

<sup>151</sup> College of Wooster. *Course Catalogue*. Wooster, Ohio, 1897. 16-17.

impressionable women's bodies needed to be addressed because they, as university students, entered historically masculine space. Initially, students would be housed in a boarding house in town, which provided little to no supervision, which allowed students more freedom to be promiscuous and "corrupt" themselves. However, offering a dormitory "superintended by a competent matron" ensured that their daughters' sexual innocence and Victorian morality would remain intact. As they navigated this new terrain, Victorian principles still mandated the sanctification of the woman's bodily and spiritual purity.

The specification that the female students of Hoover Cottage would be under the supervision of a "competent matron, and directly under the care of Faculty" reinforces the necessity of protecting, monitoring, and infantilizing young women. This desire to protect feminine purity to sustain Victorian culture simultaneously protects the young female students as they enter this new space, and polices their bodies, dictating their movement in the public space. This is further emphasized by the complexity of keeping a "room for gymnastic exercises" also within the confines of Hoover Cottage. The Cottage, as designated female space, allots for this kind of other, not necessarily feminine activity within the confines of the private sphere.

As previously explored in Chapter III, the majority of critics of women riding bicycles drew their support from medical research. Similarly, critics of co-eds voiced their concern that studying too diligently and using too much energy on her studies would detract from her procreational capabilities. Parents were even advised in the 1920s to limit their daughter's energy spent on her school work during puberty, lest she be

overcome by insanity, hysteria, and epilepsy. The 1926 reference book, *The Circle of Knowledge* advised:

Even though no actual nervous diseases develop, there is quite commonly during this change from childhood to adult life a period of nervous excitability and exhaustion accompanied by physical weakness, which to a great extent unfits the young person for close pursuit of his or her studies. Particularly in young girls is there the greatest necessity for curtailing any tendency to overwork at school during this period.<sup>152</sup>

This excerpt reflects a certain anxiety of women placing too much emphasis on activities which were unnatural for her. According to this advice, the excess mental strain would unfortunately manifest in socially constructed diseases like hysteria and neurasthenia, a “fictive nervous disease that supposedly befell women who wasted their energy reserves on strenuous endeavors like a college education or sensual experiences like masturbation.”<sup>153</sup> This anxiety about a whole, violent bodily reaction to women stepping beyond their sphere’s limits reveals this trend of using biology and science to reinforce separate spheres.

As women pursued “naturally masculine” endeavors, like a college education, they were pioneers moving into new, unexplored spaces. When they enrolled at newly established seminaries and programs at historically all-male institutions of higher education, they ventured beyond the feminine sphere of influence. Even though Victorian spheres of influence colored women’s curriculums at their institutions, all-female colleges and universities gave their students leadership opportunities and experiences independent of the typical domestic sphere. While institutions like the College of Wooster and Oberlin College - historically co-educational schools - offered

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<sup>152</sup> Ruoff, Henry W., ed. *The Circle of Knowledge*. Washington, D.C.: Standard Publishing Company, 1926, 1040.

<sup>153</sup> Zeitz, *Flapper*, location 2216 of 5904.

less opportunities for women, they still allowed women to every course of study and prided themselves on being institutions where women could take the same collegiate course load and be just as successful as the male students. For example, from 1883-1904, the College of Wooster's course catalogue reported:

*The co-education of the sexes* has proved unquestionably successful. The relative standing of the young women in the classes has shown their ability, in all respects, to master the difficulties of the College Course, and maintain the highest rank. Their presence is a constant stimulus to study, to order, and to a courteous bearing, in all the exercises of the Institutions.<sup>154</sup>

In this assertion, Wooster makes it clear that the co-education of sexes is not only successful, but young women had equal mettle to their male counterparts in the collegiate course load, while also exercising a civilizing influence on male students.

Far from the 1927 excerpt in *Circle of Knowledge* and several other critics who warned that women should limit their intellectual stimulation, lest they detract energy from their natural womanly function, Wooster championed that these female students not only showed they were academically capable, but enhanced the school's environment. Unique as this way of thinking was, women had yet take on leadership roles on campus outside of the two sororities and one all-female literature society. These female students continually had to acknowledge, consciously or subconsciously, that they were navigating a male public space, reinforced by the need for female-housing supervision by a "respectable matron" and gendered curricula, because women were more likely to pursue the literature, bookkeeping, and music courses, and only a handful of women competed in the graduate program.

Fear of the threat of the female body and mind propelled the critics of women's higher education. The more a woman learned, her critics would argue, the more likely she

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<sup>154</sup> *College of Wooster Course Catalogue*, 1883-1904, 39.

would exhibit masculine traits and move away from Victorian family structure. The infiltration of women into the masculine sphere of influence made women not only a threat, but competitive. This competition undermined the very base of separate spheres philosophy. The more women invaded this space, the more space they would need to grow and create new opportunities.



## Conclusion

On May 19, 1919, members of Congress proposed a short and simple amendment to the Constitution. The Nineteenth Amendment states: “The right of the citizens of the United States shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State on the account of sex.”<sup>155</sup> For the first wave feminist suffragettes, this singular sentence made all of their rallies, protests, and prison time worth every moment. Ratified in 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment gave women not just the vote and political power, but symbolically reflected national recognition that they were educated citizens with voices to be heard.

While the experiences women may have had separately with the brassiere, bicycles, and higher learning were individually beneficial for women’s mental and physical health, the combination of three facets resulted in white, middle class women’s liberation from the private Victorian sphere. As women went for solitary bicycle rides, discarded their mother’s corsets, and experienced collegiate educations, they not only spatially challenged Victorian conventions, but intellectually, through the pathways of academia. These three aspects of women’s liberation allow us to have a larger conversation about the politics of public space at the turn of the century. This “real world” difference between the public and private sphere, which Victorian conventions mandated women maintain, exposed them to the modern ideas which characterized the New Woman. These opportunities to move through historically and socially constructed gendered spaces prompted a larger conversation about the role of women as American citizens with an active role and voice in the political sphere.

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<sup>155</sup> Can be found on the online National Archives: <http://www.archives.gov/>

The combination of how the individual opportunities for autonomy which women accessed through the brassiere, bicycle, and higher education not only brought them into new, predominately male spaces, but also deconstructed Victorian conventions of gender. Women who spoke out against the corset and adopted the brassiere denied the policing of the shape of their bodies according to the fashion codes of the very clothes on their skin. The corset went further than mere style: it restricted movement and autonomy. Women who wore them had the privilege of not needing to move around and exert excessive energy, yet sacrificed their ease of movement to make them appear more docile and submissive to the male gaze. The corset changed how women navigated the world around them. The brassiere took the pressure away from the hips and ribcage, placing it in the shoulders, freeing women to move with flexibility.

Once women grew accustomed to less restricted movement, they could pursue more athletic activities, such as cycling. While the bicycle began as an easy and cheap way for men to move about during their leisure time, women gradually took to cycling as well during the 1890s. Over time, young women moved from wearing full skirts while riding tandem bicycles accompanied by their husbands, to wearing bloomers to ride drop-frame bicycles in search of adventures without supervision. The bicycle itself served as a great equalizer of the sexes, requiring every daring rider to have the same diligence and patience in the learning process. Additionally, the bicycle reinforced the push for rational dress and challenged the ways people thought about women and their allegedly limited ability for physical activity. Many able women readily became avid cyclists. Ultimately, the bicycle presented many women with choice to make their own decisions and move independently.



As the Smith Junior class of 1897 reflected over what they described "As the Renaissance of our college course," in their Class book, they recalled, "Logic purges the brain of intellectual heresies. It makes girls think like boys. Indeed, it is such a manly accomplishment, I wonder that President Seelye allows it."<sup>156</sup> Education may be the penultimate step within the span of this thesis, but its implications for women are far reaching and long enduring. Women's access into this new intellectual space challenged patriarchal structural expectations for their gender performance and pushed boundaries for their perceived intellectual potential.

While predominantly only white, middle to upper middle class women took part and benefitted from this shift in gender expectations, the experiences of these women prompted a conversation about how limiting "womanhood" was for many of them. These small steps critiquing expectations of appropriate feminine behavior began an important discussion about gendered expectations. Assumptions of gendered behavior have become especially evident in recent years with the advent of intersectional feminism. Feminists examine the complexity of class, race, and gender within the societal, cultural, and institutional structures of privilege. From this thesis, we can examine the importance of an intersectional approach to examining the political implications of space. While my thesis discusses the outward movement of middle class white women, women of color and low-income women still struggle to be heard and to assert their right to public space in a system which actively works against them.

For these persistent problems, we need to open up this conversation into one about the politics of gender and space within contemporary American culture. Similar to women's need to push into new spaces such as college campuses, women today still are

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<sup>156</sup> Smith College. *Class of 1897 History*. Northampton, Mass.: Smith College, 1897, 94.

still required to be mindful of how they navigate the world they inhabit. Women in the twenty-first century continue to unconsciously make themselves small in a man's world. We see the conversation continue today with the recent awareness of the "manspreading" issue on subways and in the way women will unconsciously cede their space on a



Figure 5.1: The Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (M.T.A) Official Anti-Manspreading Poster.

sidewalk to men. The patriarchal system continues to restrain women like the corsets of the nineteenth century.

Women continue to face discrimination and disrespect in historically masculine spaces today. For example, when Congresswoman Gillibrand

reported in 2013 that she stood by in an elevator while her colleague said "You know, Kristen, you're even pretty when you're fat." From big cities like New York to small towns like Wooster, Ohio, women walk to work every day and face unsolicited comments and catcalls about their appearances, and need to be wary when walking home alone at night. Women are taught to carry pepper spray, rape whistles, and make their clothing less revealing, yet no one teaches men to respect the space women's bodies inhabit in the public sphere as their own. To this day, women continue to decisively claim and protect the movement they have taken into the public sphere. Since the New Woman's first steps out the door in her shortened skirts, and on to the bicycle to

experience the world around her, women still need to assertively claim their equal right to public space, and to push the boundaries further.

Perhaps we need to turn to satire as a way to address this perpetuating negation of women's entry into historically and socially constructed masculine space. During an episode of Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show*, Kristen Schaal, senior women's correspondent, mocked the staunch defenders of "manspreading" and "men's rights" activists.

The subway is the last place men have left. We have literally driven you underground to find that last inch of ball space. And now society says no! Even there, man's place is on one seat with knees together. As a woman who has struggled her entire life to keep her knees together, I am your ally.

As this thesis illustrates, women have struggled time and time again to assert their human right to access of public space. Schaal addresses this history of subjugation. From the first moments girls are taught gender, they are instructed to be small, obedient, and how to politely sit with knees together and ankles crossed. This anxiety of space on the New York subway is more than a battle of the sexes; it is about masculine entitlement to socially and historically constructed public space. It is an uphill battle that women have struggled with for hundreds of years. Now is the time for women of every class, race, sexual orientation, gender performance, and ability to don comfortable clothing, grab a bicycle, and use their college degrees to ride into and conquer masculine space, the final frontier.



## Annotated Bibliography

### Primary Sources

Connors, Mark. *Search Lights on Health*. 1894.

Doctor of Medicine Mark Connors wrote this medical text intended for a general audience and sought to inform them about general maladies and common, easy ways to cure them. In this text, I utilize his chapter on the negative effects corsets can cause. He writes a brief history of corsets, thus placing them into historical context, yet warns women against tight lacing, and frames this in terms of aesthetics. Most importantly, Connors provides this research with a late nineteenth century condemnation of the corset,

*College of Wooster Course Catalogue*. Wooster, Ohio, 1883-1908.

These catalogues, written for the college students and faculty, walk through the classes and regulations for the school year. The catalogues also listed all of the students competing in the graduate programs, and the undergraduate students, along with which courses they were pursuing. This source sheds light on my research question in the General Information section, which discusses the benefits of “Coeducation of the Sexes” and the equal opportunities of the female students to all courses offered at the college. Most importantly, this sources adds to this discussion about the devices of women entering the public sphere and academia, and how they navigated that space.

*Historical Sketch of Mount Holyoke Seminary*. Springfield, Mass: Clark W. Bryan and Company, Printers, 1878.

The *Historical Sketch of Mount Holyoke* was originally written at the request of the Commissioner of Education and was to represent the Department of the Interior in relation to the National Centennial of 1876. This short history maps out the grounds and founding of Mount Holyoke Seminary in 1837 and describes the daily life of the students at this all-female higher education institution. This primary source paints a picture of what going to an institution of this kind was like under Victorian conventions. The framing of gender in these women’s education is particularly revealing for this thesis.

*Ladies’ Home Journal*. December 1897- February 1921. Print.

The popular magazine *Ladies’ Home Journal* targeted middle to upper middle class women and updated them on fashion, how to furnish their homes, provided advice on far ranging etiquette, and published new stories every week. In this research, I use this magazine (specifically the editions published from December 1897 through February 1921) as a medium to gauge how popular culture perceived the technologies utilized by the New Woman. I specifically analyzed

corset, brassiere, and bicycle advertisements to see how they were marketed to this particular group of women over the span of nearly twenty years in order to examine this social shift over time.

Melendy, Mary R. *Perfect Womanhood*, 1903.

Doctor of medicine Mary R. Melendy wrote this text for women as an informational manual about their bodies. She discusses everything from skincare, to puberty, to how to be a proper wife, to how to raise children. I primarily use her work on the corset in this research. As a contemporary of the corset, she discusses how to alleviate maladies which may accompany wearing it, such as shortness of breath and dizziness. She condemns the practice of tight lacing and advises women it was bad for their health.

Patterson, Martha H. *The American New Woman Revisited; A Reader, 1894-1930*. New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2008.

This source is a compilation of several primary sources. Patterson provides context for each source and cites the all. In her introduction, she argues that these sources illustrate the transition from Victorian ideology to the modern New Woman. In doing so, she discusses how the New Woman and Woman Question threaten Victorians, marriage, and the philosophy separate spheres, while challenging double standards of the time. I utilize this source for it's primary sources and contextualization of the New Woman for my own analysis.

Ruoff, Henry W., ed. *The Circle of Knowledge*. Washington, D.C.: Standard Publishing Company, 1926

Editor Henry W. Ruoff, who earned his Master's Degree, LITT.D., and D.C.L., constructed this encyclopedia to be an easily accessible reference for the common person. From the solar system, to categorizing plants, to manners, this guide is all encompassing and written to be the expert on all subjects. For my research question, I utilize the sections entitled "The Period of Puberty and and its Special Problems" and "Conditions of Bones and Muscles at the Period of Puberty" to examine the construction of sexuality and how authorities viewed and described developing bodies and gendered them.

Shephard, E. R. *For Girls: A Special Physiology; Being a Supplement to the Study of General Physiology*. Ninth. Chicago: Sanitary Publishing Co., 1887.

Mrs. E. R. Shephard wrote this medical guide to serve as a way to advise young girls and their mothers on the propriety of growing into "womanhood." I utilize this primary source as a late nineteenth century authority of women's health. Shephard's chapter entitled "A Fine Figure" informs my research in the way that she constructs the corset as a danger to a young woman's bodily development. She warns against heavily skirts placing unsurmountable amounts

of weight upon the abdomen, tight lacing, and readjusting so that the majority of the weight rests upon the shoulders. Thus, Shephard was a fairly progressive thinker in her time, as she described the evils of the corset.

*Class of 1897 History*. Northampton: Smith College, 1897.

The *Class of 1897 History* served as a yearbook for the Smith College students for 1897. The students themselves wrote the text as a testament to their past year, and as a way to preserve the memories they shared. I utilize this text as a snapshot of what student life was like for female students in the late nineteenth century, still within the throes of the Victorian era. This history documents the ways that Victorians preserved gender roles while women moved into this new space.

Maria E. Ward, *Bicycling for Ladies : With Hints as to the Art of Wheeling, Advice to Beginners, Dress, Care of the Bicycle, Mechanics, Training, Exercise, Etc., Etc.* New York: Brentano's, 1896

Maria E. Ward, bicycle riding enthusiast, wrote this guide to advise women step by step to mastering the bicycle. Even though it is a mostly technical document, she frames her discussion of the bicycle as a beneficial and easily accessible instrument for everyone. Her text is useful to this thesis because her work paints a snapshot into the life of a late nineteenth century cyclist. Her manual also provides insight into the mental and physical benefits of cycling.

Willard, Frances. *A Wheel Within a Wheel; A Woman's Quest for Freedom with Some Reflections by the Way*. Bedford, Massachusetts: Applewood Books, 1895.

Willard was a temperance movement leader and collegiate educator who wrote this memoir illustrating a step-by-step process on how to learn how to ride a bicycle. In this long essay, Willard applies the process of mastering the bicycle to a larger metaphor for life and having control and autonomy, along with the health benefits of exercise and keeping a certain level of fitness. Willard also encourages women to go forth and follow her example to learn how to ride. I use this source in my research as an example of an influential woman advising other women to ride the bicycle and look at how Willard sees the bicycle as an instrument of power for women.

## Secondary Sources

Burstyn, Joan N. *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*. New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books, 1980.

Historian Joan N. Burstyn draws from statistics of institutions of higher education attendance rates, along with newspapers, magazines, and first accounts from all views on higher education for women in the Victorian era, namely the early nineteenth century through the 1890s. She wrote this book with the intent to analyze and prove to her readers the threat that women's higher education had to the Victorian societal structure, and to what extent this impacted Victorian society based on opposition to women entering this space. I utilize this source as context for how increased access to higher education allowed American women to fully move past Victorian ideology and embrace New Womanhood.

Christie-Robin, Julia, Belinda T. Orzada, and Dilia López-Gydosh. "From Bustles to Bloomers: Exploring the Bicycle's Influence on American Women's Fashion, 1880-1914." *Journal Of American Culture* 35, no. 4 (December 2012): 315-331. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost.

These scholars present an analysis of how the bicycle influenced women's dress reform. While they acknowledge that the advent of the bicycle in the United States did not singularly overhaul women's fashion from the long skirts and corsets of the Victorian era to the more accessible bloomers, they do tie these two narratives together in order to show the correlation of dress reform and bicycles from 1880-1914. Their work informs my research in that it shows this connection of dress reform and bicycles, which helps synthesis Chapter II and III.

Ehrenreich, Barbara, and Deirdre English. *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts' Advice to Women*. Second. New York: Anchor Books, 2005.

Ehrenreich and English examine the complexities of the "Woman Question" in the greater context of advice literature aimed towards women during this era where there was confusion as to what a woman should do and be. They discuss the origins of the "Woman Question" and its context in the United States after the decline of agrarian societies. This source fits into my research because I need to understand who was seen as an authority on women's health and movement. I utilize this source as a way to inform my knowledge in how the "Woman Question" formed, and how medical authorities shaped this shifting role as women for the populace. Additionally, they discuss how manufacturers marketed the bicycle to women. Thus revealing how the general public was constructed to gender the way women went about riding bicycles.



Farrell-Beck, Jane, and Colleen Gau. *Uplift: The Bra in America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.

Scholars Farrell-Beck and Gau place the history of the brassiere within the greater history of women as a “social and material” item. They recall the two important phases of the production and introduction of the brassiere into popular fashion: selling breast supporters by mainly mail order, and when manufacturers sold brassieres which varied by size and style within their own shops, whether specialty, retailer, or department. I use this source as a way to understand the historical context of the brassiere, and to inform my own knowledge on the history of the brassiere itself.

Farrell-Beck, J., Poresky, L., Paff, J., & Moon, C. *Brassieres and Women's Health from 1863 to 1940*. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 16(3), 105-115. 1998.

Social historians Jane Farrell Beck, Laura Poresky, Jennifer Paff, and Cassandra Moon discuss the historical context for the development of the brassiere, and the medical rationale for its rising popularity. They frame the propagation of the brassiere and dress reform in medical terms and medical knowledge. Through the brassiere, they argue, women had more authority on their own well being and reproductive health. Women's integral role in dress reform allowed them to make changes within the private sphere of influence. Their research informs my thesis by providing a context for the shift from the corset to the brassiere, and the active role women had in that societal change.

Fields, Jill. *An Intimate Affair: Women, Lingerie, and Sexuality*. University of California Press, 2007.

Fields, a professor of history at the California State University at Fresno, utilizes a gender lens to critically analyze the social and cultural history of undergarments and their direct connection to sexuality.. She argues that understanding the historical context for how the commercialization and support of corsets shaped the way that women view their own bodies allows us to see how fashion functions as an extension of patriarchal social control. Therefore anxiety around the condition and construction of these garments reveals tension about the changing status of women. In this thesis, I use Fields' work to help construct the historical context of the shift from the corset to the brassiere, and to understand the connection to women as sexual beings during the Victorian era.

Garvey, Ellen Gruber. *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s*. First. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Garvey's research discusses how advertisements were gendered for the consumers. Within this text, I focus on the fourth chapter called "Reframing the Bicycle: Magazines and Scorching Women." This chapter in particular examines how the marketing of the bicycle, a new phenomenon in the United States which increased in popularity during the 1890s, Garvey argues that companies marketed the bicycle in a way to place it within the social narrative as a way to find romance, happiness, freedom, and social acceptance. While this was a mostly fiction, it served as a way to market the bicycle was non-deviant. Additionally, most the arguments either for or against the bicycle, outside of the commercial fantasy, were rooted in medical knowledge. I use Garvey's work to contextualize my own analysis of advertisements of bicycles from 1890-1930.

Horowitz, Helen Lefkowitz. *Attitudes toward Sex in Antebellum America: A Brief History with Documents*. New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2006.

Professor of American Studies and History at Smith College Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz's research describes the process of the construction of American Victorian conventions and morality, especially as it pertains to sexuality. She constructs a nuanced narrative of the construction of sexuality in antebellum America. I utilize Horowitz's work to ground my knowledge on the context of the Comstock Law. Her work analyzes how the Comstock Law came to pass and why it was largely accepted according to Victorian Conventions.

Marks, Patricia. *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky. 1990.

Marks' book traces the shift from Victorian ideals to the New Woman by analysis of language and different tenets of life she occupied. Marks argues that the humanization of the New Woman in the American context meant that Americans saw here as an average woman more quickly than the British. She goes back to the initial argument between Sarah Grand and Ouida where the term "New Woman" was coined to flesh out this mysterious and mythological caricature. I utilize her chapter "Women's Athletics; A Bicycle Built for One" where she discusses the nuances of an athletic woman and the threat she was in Victorian society. Marks argues that the bicycle in particular increased the New Woman's influence and gave her the confidence to take control of her own movements. I use this source to contextualize and analyze my own primary sources on the bicycle.

Miller, Neil. *Out of the Past; Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present*. New York: Alyson Books, 2006.

Neil Miller, journalism and nonfiction writing teacher at Tufts University, writes this compilation uncovers over a century of selected aspects of gay and lesbian life in the United States. I utilize chapter five on "Romantic Relationships" in this research. This section examines intimate female relationships and the change of perception of the deviance of these relationships over time. I use this secondary source to analyze the connection between transgressing gender boundaries and its connection to assumptions of sexuality.

Nash, Margaret A. "A Means of Honorable Support: Art and Music in Women's Education in the Mid-Nineteenth Century." *History of Education Quarterly*, Historical Period: ca 1851 to ca 1900, 53, no. 1. February 2013.

Margaret A. Nash, Associate Professor at the University of California (Riverside), uses curricula and personal accounts to examine the limiting label "ornamental studies" previous historians have placed upon women's higher education during the Victorian era. Historians contend that ornamental or "pursuing ornamental skills" referred to a woman's education in music and the arts, but Nash argues that teachers, students, and educators used it synonymously to all academic subjects. Nash maintains that while an education in the arts may have been more limiting for women, it was still

Rosenberg, Rosalind. *Divided Lives; American Women in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1992.

Rosalind Rosenberg, professor of history at Barnard College, discusses the changing role of women at the beginning of the twentieth century. She argues that women have led lives divided between domestic and paid labor, and separate from one another. Rosenberg looks at the larger political, economic, and cultural context of this tension in the fractured lives women lived in order to explore why these socially and historically constructed roles for women began, and how it is impossible to give a simple history of the woman's experience. She examines the complexity of women's experience at the turn of the century, dependent on the intersections of class, race, sexuality, and gender performance. Rosenberg's research sheds light on my thesis in the discussion of women's changing roles at the beginning of the twentieth century. I utilize her work when examining access to women's higher education and the effects of accessibility to that privilege.

Rothblum, Esther D., and Kathleen A. Brehony, eds. *Boston Marriages: Romantic but Asexual Relationships among Contemporary Lesbians*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 2014.

Rothblum, professor of psychology at the University of Vermont, and Brehony, psychotherapist, question the lack of research pursued upon lesbian relationships

that lack the physical component, yet still are considered romantic and in, what they and their friends still consider, marriage-esque. I use this source to look into the historical significance and definition of “Boston Marriage” to see where, what contemporary society deems, deviant gender and sexuality intersect. More specifically, I focus on the chapter “Nineteenth-century Boston Marriages” to contextualize “lesbian” relationships within the time period I am researching. This work informs my research on female same-sex relationships.

John L. Rury. “Vocationalism for Home and Work: Women’s Education in the United States, 1880-1930.” *History of Education Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 21–44.

John L. Rury, history professor at Antioch College, examines how Victorian conventions constructed women’s education in the United States from 1880-1930. He examined curriculum and memoirs in order to explain this shifting importance of women’s education and roles at home. His research shows the heightened emphasis on home economic courses during this time in order to elevate the domestic sphere, thus stemming the flow of women away from the home. Rury analyzes the different avenues women took before 1930 and how these roads were different aspects of a holistic idea of women's education. He argues that examining these separate facets of women's education would help us understand the importance of vocational training and school reform at the beginning of the twentieth century. In my research, Rury’s work informs my knowledge of the history of women’s education and the tension between women leaving the home and the desire to limit this change.

Smith, Robert A. *A Social History of the Bicycle*. United States: American Heritage Press, 1972.

Smith, a social historian, discusses the social historical context for the bicycle. In this book, Smith examines how inventors adapted and developed the bicycle for different riders and occasions. He argues that the bicycle’s development was contingent on the American society which popularized it. While this source may be dated, it still provides insight to social commentary of the bicycle at the end of nineteenth century and remains relevant for the purposes of this thesis. I utilize this source as a way to provide historical context for the creation of the bicycle, outside of a gender analysis.

Steele, Valerie. *The Corset; a Cultural History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

Valerie Steele, fashion historian and curator and director at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, uses the artistic aspects of the corset in order to describe its historical importance. In this book, she uses the technical aspects of hundreds of years of corsets to show how the corset was not an extension of

patriarchal society, but a way for women to express individuality and status. Given that Steele writes as a curator and director at the Fashion Institute, she appreciates the corset as an art form and its extensive role in the long history of fashion, rather than seeing its social implications. Steele's work enhances my research as a contrary opinion to other historians who I have read on the history of the corset and brassiere.

The M.T.A. Official Anti-Manspreading Poster. Fitzsimmons, Emma G. "A Scourge Is Spreading. M.T.A's Cure? Dude, Close Your Legs." *The New York Times*, December 20, 2014.

In this newspaper article, written by journalist Emma G. Fitzsimmons, discusses the new awareness of men taking up more space on subway seats, also commonly referred to as "manspreading." She discusses how women, the city, and men's rights activists view this newly addressed, yet old issue with space on public transport. I utilize this source as a way to look at contemporary manifestations of the contestation of public space between men and women.

Turpin, Andrea L. "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College: Religion, Class, and Curriculum in the Educational Visions of Catharine Beecher and Mary Lyon." *History of Education Quarterly* 50, no. 2. May 2010.

Andrea L. Turpin, Ph.D. candidate at the University of Notre Dame, uses the memoirs and personal writings of Emma Willard, Catherine Beecher, and Mary Lyon to examine the history of the philosophy behind women's higher education. She discusses how religious rhetoric justified women's education, as a way for them to be ideal mothers and primary instructors for their children. She argues that these three thinkers should be considered as separate entities, as previous historians have combined their theories. However, I utilize Turpin's research to inform the historical background of women's higher education and to consider the philosophical justification for educated women within their Victorian sphere of influence.

Wilson, Tracy V., and Holly Frey. *Elizabeth Blackwell, America's First Female M.D.* Stuff You Missed in History Class, March 24, 2014.  
<http://www.missedinhistory.com/podcasts/elizabeth-blackwell-americas-first-female-m-d>.

Podcasters and history enthusiasts Tracy V. Wilson and Holly Frey used personal accounts by Blackwell, her family, her husbands, and the institutions she attended in order to paint a portrait of Elizabeth Blackwell for their listeners. They walk their listeners through the life and times of Blackwell, discussing her upbringing and her successes and challenges as she broke into a typically masculine field of work. I utilize this source for background information about the first women who entered medicine as a medical profession and the obstacles they faced.

Zeitz, Joshua. *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and the Women Who Made America Modern*. Kindle. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006.

Joshua Zeitz, American historian from New Jersey, drew from several interviews, newspaper articles, biographies, and statistics about the status of women from the 1920s to research who flappers were in the context of the roaring twenties. He argues that the flapper cannot be narrowed down to just one type of individual without influence in American history, but was a dynamic part of making the United States a modern country in terms of fashion, women's liberation, and ideas about female sexuality. Zeitz's work sheds light on my research as historical context for women's liberation and the New Woman in the 1920s, as well as reinforces the idea of the restrictive nature of the corset and New Woman's fashion.

