

Constructing the Self:  
Female Identity Development in the Turn-of-the-Century South

By

Sarah Fried

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Department of History  
of Vanderbilt University in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for Honors in History.

2002

On the Basis of this thesis and of  
the written and oral examinations  
taken by the candidate on  
April 19 and on April 29  
we, the undersigned, recommend  
that the candidate be awarded  
High Honors in History:

Debra Jo Blunt  
Kathleen Cranford  
Lee Tavel

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April 2002

**WebMail - Plans for the Next Week**

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**Cc:** "Roger Reed (E-mail)" <rreed@gordian-health.com>

**Subject:** Plans for the Next Week

**Status:**  Urgent  New

Just to reiterate what we agreed to in class yesterday, we will divide into two groups (due to schedule conflicts among you):

- \* the manuscript group - Amanda, Laurel, Bin, and Glenn - to meet at 2:30 on Monday, Apr. 29;
- \* the data analysis group - McCall, Keith, Chase, and Jeff - to meet at 2:00 on Tuesday, Apr. 30 (I'll need Bin and/or Glenn to join us to guide us on data categories to use and new form/old/form mapping)

Unless you hear otherwise, let me suggest that both groups meet at the MOT Program Office (342 Featheringill Hall - directly above the EECS conference room we met in yesterday). By then I'll have a firm meeting location.

Roger and Thad - if you can join us at either or both meetings, that would be wonderful.

The assignments are as follows:

- \* The manuscript group will go through the articles chosen by the class from the two journals, select the ones we need to use, determine the best place for them to go, update the discussion to include them, and drop anything that should be discarded as no longer useful. My suggestion in class was that you group together all the "Stein" articles and all the Ozminkowski articles as separate streams, and that you rely most heavily on the most recently published (say, 2000+) articles, using the older articles only if they contain completely different information.
- \* The data analysis group will proceed with the hypothesis-testing and the factor analysis using selected participation, lifestyle, and biometric data as the output variables. For smokers, the primary output biometric would be smoking frequency; for the weight loss group, we'd look at body mass index (derived variable), the exercise questions, cholesterol levels (HDL and LDL), glucose, and blood pressure. For both groups we'd look at some of the lifestyle variables concerning sense of

well-being, etc. We agreed we would compare enrollees vs. non-enrollees on the HRA data, and use participation level (pmonths+nmonths) as well as compliance (pmonths/(pmonths + nmonths). We would do the factor analysis (Hypothesis 3) to find the mix of HRA variables that contribute most to participation and changes in biometrics.

That's the way I remember it - please let me know if I've missed something. I think we're going to have to cut it off with these meetings, at least as a group, so let's get as far as we can.

Thank you all for your patience and persistence.

JB

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## INTRODUCTION

Unless Willard supports me, and does his duty I will not remain his wife, I am too young to allow him to ruin my life in this way, yet I have to live in the time that I am suing for a divorce, and I have no money or any way to get along but to start out in the world and make my way... The insults, that fall to a woman who battles with the world, are what I have dreaded.<sup>1</sup>

When Margaret Sloan married Willard Leland in 1900, she was twenty-six years old and full of hope. Margaret walked down the aisle believing that her husband would bring her happiness. But Willard also represented for her a life of duty. A good Southern belle, Margaret was born into a wealthy family and knew a world where “woman” meant daughter, wife, and mother. Margaret believed that by dedicating herself to husband, family, and the domestic life, she would fulfill her role as a woman in nineteenth century America. Unfortunately, she never found the happiness that marriage seemed to promise her. Instead, the passions of youthful love gave way to disappointment, leading Margaret to rethink how she defined herself as an individual.

Beginning on January 1, 1900, Margaret maintained a two-year reflective diary in which she recorded her engagement, marriage, separation, and reconciliation with her husband. Her diary, however, recounts more than her “Shattered Dream,” as the published version is known.<sup>2</sup> Margaret’s diary became a means for her to challenge, accept, reject, and internalize social expectations. In the above entry, Margaret referred to herself as “a woman who battles with the world.” It seems that when her marriage failed, Margaret reconsidered her role as a woman in society. She acknowledged the “insults” that would result from divorce, suggesting that she understood her rejection of Willard’s behavior as translating into a rejection of social norms. As Margaret struggled

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<sup>1</sup> Diary Margaret Sloan, January 8, 1901 cited from: Harold Woodell, ed., The Shattered Dream: A Southern Bride at the Turn of the Century (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 170.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

with the tensions that arose between society's expectations of a "good woman" and the realities of her life, her vocabulary came to encompass not only the familiar term "duty," but also the less feminine desires for "divorce" and "money." Disappointment encouraged her to think outside of social norms.

Carolyn Heilbrun has written, "Above all other prohibitions, what has been forbidden to women is anger, together with the open admission of the desire for power and control over one's life."<sup>3</sup> Heilbrun emphasizes that women's lives are inherently filled with tension, but that biographies and portrayals of women have historically tended to suppress negative emotions. In both literature and scholarly works, women seem lacking in anger, frustration, or even discontent.<sup>4</sup> Heilbrun argues that when we ignore these emotions, we inhibit social progress and the expansion of women's roles and responsibilities. She therefore asks scholars to acknowledge tension in women's lives, which would in turn mean acknowledging struggle as a component of identity.

This thesis examines how young, middle-class, white Southern women formulated a concept of "self." In examining the diaries and letters of five women, Margaret Sloan, Patsy Graham, Emma Croom, Polly Draper, and Emmy Hughes, I intend to do what Heilbrun criticizes historians for neglecting. I will reveal more than the joys, hopes, excitement, and anticipation of women's everyday lives. I will emphasize the hesitation, anxiety, anger, and fear that women felt as they formulated their sense of self.

Throughout this thesis I will use "self" synonymously with "identity;" I seek to identify how young women at the turn of the century constructed identity. How did social

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<sup>3</sup> Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: WW Norton and Company. 1988), 13.

<sup>4</sup> According to Heilbrun, denying women anger or the means to recognize anger in oneself forbids women power and control. Ibid.

and familial expectations shape perceptions of womanhood, femininity, and gender? And how did these perceptions shape women's sense of place in the world? I will adopt an interpretation of the self that builds on the works of those scholars who view the self as a site of struggle and reflection. I view the self as reflective of the individual, her relationships and her interactions in society, and her personal introspection. I envision the "self" as defined by the integration of new experiences into personal consciousness. The self throughout this thesis will, therefore, refer to the realm of introspection in women's lives where competing messages and ambiguities about society, family, and gender are worked out. What interests me is how my diarists, born and nurtured in the tradition-bound South, incorporated new cultural messages into their identities.

The onset of new social and cultural changes at the turn of the twentieth century complicated identity construction. The "Victorian Era" had indeed begun to give way towards a more modern America, and women entered new and more public areas of American society. During this period, industrialization and urbanization transformed the American cultural system.<sup>5</sup> The subsequent rise of a consumer culture broke down social barriers that had grounded women's identities within their relationships to men, and thereby allowed for the formation of a more self-oriented culture.<sup>6</sup> Southern women, in particular, struggled with the conflict between these new ideas as opposed to past traditions of womanhood.

The messages women encountered in the South in 1900 included both older notions of womanhood, and, simultaneously, the more liberal ideas of the Post-bellum

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<sup>5</sup> Geoffrey Blodgett, Victorian America, ed. Daniel Walker Howe (Philadelphia, PA: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), 7.

<sup>6</sup> I assume Daniel Walker Howe's definition of culture. He writes, "An evolving system of beliefs, attitudes, and techniques, transmitted from generation to generation, and finding expression in innumerable activities people learn." Blodgett, 5.

period. During the early decades of the nineteenth century, society had prescribed separate male and female spheres.<sup>7</sup> These spheres prescribed rigid notions of appropriate gender behavior, and consequently constructed a seemingly concrete notion of womanhood: the “True Woman” of Victorian America reigned in the home.<sup>8</sup> She used her natural, and even divine, sensibilities to govern the home and family. Her place was “unquestionably by the fireside – as daughter, sister, but most of all as wife and mother.”<sup>9</sup> She was pious, pure, submissive, domestic, and loving. But as a more liberal American modernity evolved, so too did notions of womanhood.

Beginning with the Civil War in the 1860s, women encountered responsibilities outside notions of female passiveness and weakness. The Civil War asked women to participate in a wider range of social and economic activities.<sup>10</sup> In the years following the War, Northern women experienced the influence of these changes. But in the South change came much more slowly. Southern society in the 1890s reached back into older notions of womanhood, and attempted to position women within the more traditional prototype of femininity. Consequently, whereas women in regions of the country more affected by modernization increasingly formed relationships “not limited by geographical, familial, and class loyalties,” in the South, women assumed new roles and responsibilities at slower and more tenuous rates.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Caroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth Century America.” Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 1 no. 1 (1973): pp.1-29.

<sup>8</sup> Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820 – 1860” ed. Ronald W. Hogeland (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1973), 103-105.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Drew Giplen Faust, Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996)

<sup>11</sup> Jean E. Friedmen, The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900 (London, England: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), xvii.



Indeed, the latter part of nineteenth century witnessed, according to historian Nina Silber, the emergence of a pervasive “Victorian nostalgia” for antebellum Southern traditions. Apparently, as cultural expectations changed and women entered more public positions, “Southern women, who seemed to have discovered the joys of domesticity precisely when Northern women had grown weary of them, became the feminine ideal of many Northern men.”<sup>12</sup> The Southern woman of antebellum decades, remembered for her devotion to husband, family, and home, came to symbolize social stability. In the South, this nostalgia took shape in the “Lost Cause” movement, an effort to deify domestic and private women, as modeled by traditional notions of the ante-bellum Southern belle. In idealizing the Southern belle, turn-of-the-century Americans were resurrecting the ideology of “true womanhood.”

This domestic Southern woman became a central component of the middle class family in 1900. According to Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, by the 1860s and 1870s the middle class had “convinced itself and others that its values, its life style, its institutional creations, represented simultaneously the epitome of progress and the oldest of America’s traditions.”<sup>13</sup> Middle class families prided themselves on progress and success while clinging to older cultural imperatives. Within the home, fathers and mothers suggested appropriately female behavior, the “family claim” remaining the central tenet governing young women’s family education. Young women, therefore, encountered the limitations of older gender ideologies in the home, but simultaneously

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<sup>12</sup> Nina Silber, The Romance of Reunion (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 9-10.

<sup>13</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 167.

enjoyed the improved health, increased free time, and privilege produced by the economic and social realities of their class.<sup>14</sup>

The “True Woman” did, however, eventually evolve into the “New Woman.” Though Southern society continued to idealize the traditional “good woman,” it also allowed women to assume more public lives. Chapter one of this thesis identifies the intersection of varying cultural messages in women’s everyday lives, and reveals the tensions between old and new ideas about womanhood. Chapter two concentrates on women’s use of writing as a means to construct identity. Although Victorian ideology believed that in writing women structured and reinforced acceptance of traditional roles, by the turn of the century the diary had shifted into a place of personal introspection. This shift reveals that women claimed diary writing as a means to process the complicated messages about womanhood proffered by society. As will be revealed in Chapter 3, young women in the 1890s no longer accepted strict notions of appropriate female behavior as the core of their sense of self. On the contrary, in the relationships they forged with both friends and suitors, young women struggled with anxieties about intimacy, love, and physicality. Women’s identities emerged from their personal reflections about both True and New Woman ideologies.

I ground my argument in Carroll Smith Rosenberg’s widely debated concept of “separate spheres.” The separate spheres model of gender history has been criticized by historians like Linda Kerber for serving as “a figure of speech, the trope, on which historians came to rely when they described women’s part in American culture.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Nancy Theriot, Mothers & Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America: The Biosocial Construction of Femininity (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 81.

<sup>15</sup> Linda Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History.” The Journal of American History 75 no. 1 (1988).

Realizing Kerber's criticism, I use this framework in order to conceptualize turn-of-the-century society, and to reveal the collapse of a strictly gendered American landscape. I expand upon Smith-Rosenberg's model of a distinctly female world and posit that as men and women interacted more frequently, society came to fear the disruption women could cause to both the family and society.<sup>16</sup> Young women in 1900 came of age at a time when anxieties over sexuality, friendship, and social roles, permeated American culture. Women's activism and participation outside the home undermined gender roles, triggering men, and society in general, to promote a return to more traditional repressive roles. The tensions between newfound opportunities and retrospective social expectations shaped young women's identities.

I rely on three forms of primary source material. I examine medical texts and etiquette books in order to identify the messages concerning womanhood propagated in the general culture. Finally, I examine the diaries and letters maintained by five women, all of similar ages, economic backgrounds, family heritages, and levels of education. By examining the carefully documented writings of young Southern women, I will paint a portrait of the experiences of a particular subset of women at the turn of the century.

Although all of the women in this study are white, this thesis will refrain from discussing race. My intention is not to diminish the importance of race as having shaped young women's identities. In fact, I will suggest quite the opposite; middle and upper-middle class women in turn-of-the-century America appear to have incorporated race as a fundamental part of identity. I view the absence of race in my diarists' writing as evidence that society had not by 1900 sufficiently challenged women in the South to

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<sup>16</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth Century America."

think outside of older racial assumptions; the overall absence of race in young women's writing seems to correlate to the degree of thought and reflection dedicated to whiteness. At a time, when Lost Cause sentiments prevailed, whiteness still seems to have meant superiority and purity for Southern women during this period.

The young Southern woman of 1900 will emerge from this thesis as having evolved from the space between older and newer notions of womanhood. As new social opportunities blurred traditional notions of femininity, my diarists composed more personal notions of appropriate female behavior. The Southern novelist Ellen Glasgow wrote:

Though she felt as yet merely the vague uneasiness with which her mind recoiled from the first stirrings of change, she was beginning dimly to realize that the car of progress would move through the quiet streets before the decade was over. The smoke of factories was already succeeding the smoke of the battlefields, and from the ashes of a vanquished idealism the spirit of commercial materialism was born. What was left of the old was fighting valiantly but hopelessly against what had come of the new.<sup>17</sup>

A successful author of the 1930s, Glasgow wrote historical fiction. She reflected on the post-bellum and turn of the century decades of Southern history, completing Virginia in 1938. Glasgow preserved an awareness of change and modernization as having coexisted within cultural expectations that celebrated the traditions of "vanquished idealism." She reveals the distance that existed in 1900 between a variety of cultural imperatives. But Glasgow's "car of progress" may also have referred to a new American figure: a woman, new in form and shape, quietly emerged from the "smoke" and "ashes" into a new century. Young women in 1900 experienced the tension between what Glasgow viewed as a "valiant fight" between the old and the new.

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<sup>17</sup> Ellen Glasgow, Virginia (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), 10-11.

## CHAPTER 1: Her Life in the South: Intersections of the “Old” and the “New”

The year Nineteen hundred was more than a gateway between two centuries; it was an intermediate stage in the transition between old and new philosophies of gender and the role of women in society. The limitations imposed by social etiquette in Victorian America gave way at the turn of the century to women’s participation in a diverse array of activities. So whereas a common etiquette book stated in 1880, “A woman rude and uncultured in her manners, however beautiful in person she may be, is like an uncut diamond, whose sparkle and luster, though like that of the dog-star, are lost by the roughness of the exterior,” by the 1920s women were picketing for suffrage.<sup>18</sup> Within this forty-year period, society witnessed the liberalization of, among other things, morals and manners.<sup>19</sup> Women symbolically chose short skirts as opposed to crinolines and corsets, and generally enjoyed a broader range of opportunities. By the onset of the twentieth century, women were, therefore, forming identities that reflected divergent views of womanhood. This chapter explains the conflicting messages that women encountered in 1900, and discusses how women synthesized those messages into adult identities.

The biographies of each of the five women in this study reveal that, although the women shared in common geographic, socio-economic, and racial backgrounds, each of their stories was unique.<sup>20</sup> I, therefore, begin this thesis by examining each woman individually, in no particular order, to reveal those tensions most evident in her writing.

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<sup>18</sup> Walter R. Houghton et al., American Etiquette and Rules of Politeness (Chicago, IL: Rand, McNally & Co., Publishers, 1882), 15.

<sup>19</sup> James McGovern, “The American Woman’s Pre-World War Freedom in Manners and Morals,” The Journal of American History 55 (Sept., 1968): 315-333.

<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, equal amounts of information on each woman are not available. I, therefore, will do my best to paint a vivid and accurate portrait from those sources that are available to me. Biographical information on the women is largely dependent upon information found in the diaries, census records, and state and county histories.

What I hope to demonstrate is that society proffered competing, and often ambiguous, messages about women's proper roles. In their education, employment, and social interaction, women encountered new models of femininity. Southern women inherited a tradition of femininity defined primarily by family, but matured in environments cognizant of newer and more flexible views of appropriately gendered behavior. Within this framework, by examining the cultural clash between modernity and tradition, I reveal an environment conducive to the construction of multifaceted and complex identities.

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Martha Peirce Graham was born March 2, 1875 and died September 11, 1948. Throughout her life Martha was known to her family and friends as "Patsy," which is how she will be referred to here. On June 22, 1896 Patsy began her diary, "All Love is sacred, hopeless love most sacred of all."<sup>21</sup> The story that follows is one of a woman acutely aware of her own desires and hopes. Patsy's diary concludes in the year before her marriage to William Dixon Sanders. In the decades that followed, Patsy would mother thirteen children, ten of whom would survive to adulthood; she would accept her role as a mother and wife. But in the eighty-four entries before her last on April 1, 1897, Patsy described more than her interactions and relationships with friends and family; she recorded a portrait of herself. In her writing Patsy reveals that, although she eventually accepted appropriate female roles in the family and society, she struggled with desires for individuality. Patsy's "hopeless love" seems to have referred to a love of self. She seems to have been torn between loyalty to the traditions of her heritage and the more modern influences of her day; Patsy desired the freedom to construct a sense of self independent of family.

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<sup>21</sup> Diary of Martha Peirce Graham, June 22, 1896. Transcript: page 1.

Patsy inherited a tradition of femininity in which women accepted subservient positions in male-female relationships. Her knowledge of the long-standing traditions of appropriate female behavior may have arisen out of her connection to Southern tradition; she was born to a well-established and wealthy Virginia family.<sup>22</sup> The family prided itself in having fought to protect traditional Southern values. The War of Secession, as the Civil War was known within the family, had been an attempt to preserve not only slavery, but also the hierarchical system of men's and women's roles in society.<sup>23</sup> In Patsy's diary we see her role within a large and patriarchal family.

As one of three daughters and five brothers, Patsy grew up aware of her role in the family. She addressed her oldest sister with the proper deference as "Sister Lizzie," and cared for her brothers as a dutiful sister should. She described her relationships with each of her parents as well as her siblings, writing:

Father is always glad to have **me** with him when he drives out and I think Mother and Sister are just as glad to have **me** at home with them while Charley, Jim, and Robert make over **me** in their own ways. David and Sister Lizzie were just lovely to **me** the day I spent with them Friel and William treat me with cool indifference except when it suits their convenience to do other wise.<sup>24</sup>

Patsy emphatically highlighted her relationships to each member of the family. Her entry illustrates the importance she placed upon each relationship, yet it simultaneously reveals her frustration with her relationships to Friel and William. In many ways, Patsy conformed to traditional expectations of the Southern daughter: she cared for family

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<sup>22</sup> By the time Patsy was born, the Graham family had thoroughly established itself in Virginia. Patsy's great-grandfather, Robert Graham, immigrated to North America from County Down, Ireland, in 1750. Patsy's ancestors fought in both the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. Robert served as a Lieutenant in the Revolutionary War. Three of Robert's many grandsons, in addition to five great-grandsons, served in the Civil War. Grandson Joseph J. Graham also fought as a Colonel in the Mexican War, and later served in the state House of Representatives and Senate.

<sup>23</sup> Oral History: Malcom Robinson Sanders, son of Patsy.

<sup>24</sup> Diary of Martha Peirce Graham, July 7, 1896. Transcript: page 2. Emphasis added.

members, learned to sew and cook, and in general submitted to traditional gender roles. When relationships within the family failed, however, Patsy seems to have questioned her blind devotion.

Patsy also expressed her anxieties about her future role as mother and wife. Although she understood what it meant to be a "good woman," her writing reveals a hyper-awareness of family expectation. She wrote:

The White Girl (our cat) has the dearest little kitten you ever saw just a tiny ball of yellow down, she just has one. The other night at supper we were talking about the kitten being so small and there being just one when Sister put us all in to a roar of laughter by saying "Well I think she did mighty well to have one to be as young as she is" We all laughed there was no use trying to keep from it.<sup>25</sup>

"Sister" refers to the oldest daughter in the family, Lizzie. Throughout her diary, Patsy discusses her sister's poor health, and the subsequent delay of Lizzie's marriage. Lizzie's comment about their cat having done well to have a kitten "as young as she is" should be viewed within the context of a woman frustrated and perhaps ashamed that she had not yet begun a family. Patsy explains that the family responded to Lizzie's comment with laughter. This might suggest that the family understood the parallel between the cat and Lizzie. Her comment would have been funny because it revealed that Lizzie sympathized and identified with a cat; the comment came from a young woman, single and childless, but already of marital and parental age. Patsy obviously found the episode significant enough to record in her diary. It seems that she viewed the family's response as an avowal of her own future; young women married and had children.

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<sup>25</sup> Diary Martha Peirce Graham, July 8, 1896. Transcript, page 5.



Patsy's critical reflections on her role in the family may have arisen largely out of the privileges of her family. In pioneering the iron industry of Southwest Virginia, the Graham family amassed significant wealth.<sup>26</sup> Patsy consequently received an education more advanced than many women of her time. She attended the Madison Institute for Girls in Richmond, Kentucky and was consequently exposed to influences outside of the family. These experiences fostered a sense of her own personal autonomy. Patsy's education played a central part in shaping her discomfort with traditional womanhood. Her writing reveals anxieties about the limited future prescribed to her by family expectation.

Education at the turn of the century was a gateway into new ways of thinking, especially for women. According to Nancy Theriot, education "widened the boundaries and increased the options of middle-class woman's lives."<sup>27</sup> Schooling meant women's involvement in the larger social environment. Although the educated woman had been looked upon with disdain and suspicion in the early part of the nineteenth century, by the end of the century women were frequently attending secondary schools. In fact, by 1890 more women than men were graduating from high school. Furthermore, many colleges and state institutions were beginning to accept female students. Nearly eighty percent of colleges, universities, and professional schools admitted women by 1900.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> David Graham, son of the immigrant Robert Graham, married Martha Peirce. He worked in the mining and manufacturing of iron and iron products, built the first furnace at Cedar Run, Virginia, and directed the Wythe Lead and Zinc Mines Company. David's son, David Pierce Graham, Patsy's father, carried on and enlarged the business with his brother-in-law and partner, John W. Robinson. He continued both numerous manufacturing enterprises as well as farming: Janie Preston Collup French and Zella Armstrong. Notable Southern Families: The Crockett Family and Connecting Lives (Briston, TN: The King Printing Company, 1928), 446-447.

<sup>27</sup> Theriot, 79.

<sup>28</sup> Banner (citing Schlesinger). 6. I do not, however, want to overemphasize women's educational opportunities. Research by historian Kathryn Babb Vossler on both public and private education in West Virginia, a region geographically similar to the environments of the women in this study, suggests that although educational opportunities increased, women's education was still largely conservative. Vossler does not perceive schooling as

Patsy struggled between two cultural movements: she matured within a traditional Southern family but participated in a movement that allowed women greater interaction in society. Patsy's diary reveals her journey, full of apprehension, anxiety, and youth to weave an identity shaped by the opposing cultural messages of her day.

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Margaret Sloan was born on May 15, 1874 and died March 22, 1960. Like Patsy Graham, Margaret matured within an environment steeped in the ideals of the past and yet simultaneously open to the new. Margaret's daybook spans nearly two years of her life, beginning with her engagement to Willard Leland in January of 1900 and concluding with the couple's reconciliation after a short separation in August of 1902. In her writings throughout this period, Margaret described her disappointment in what had promised to be a perfect marriage. Margaret's diary portrays the struggles that young women encountered in their attempt to cultivate individuality within the boundaries prescribed by the notion of the "Southern Belle."<sup>29</sup> Margaret may have imbibed the ideology of true womanhood, but her involvement in a community invested in change meant that she was exposed to new gender ideals.

In many respects the true southern belle, Margaret prided herself on womanly pursuits, learning to sew, caring for family members, and charming the men in her life. She earnestly believed in and lived her life according to Protestant virtues. Furthermore, she was raised in a middle class family with deep connections to Southern history.

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having been an agent of social progress, as there was "a negligible enhancement of their [women's] self image as productive, intellectual beings, or training for their employable skills." Women's education largely focused on her role as the moral guardian of society, and included curriculums of literacy, homemaking, fine arts, and occasionally modern languages. What is important, therefore, is that regardless of the type of education she received, the New Woman of 1900 attended school. Kathryn Babb Vossler, "Women and Education in West Virginia, 1810-1909," West Virginia History 36 no. 4 (1975): 271-290. Citation: Page 280.

<sup>29</sup> Woodell, 11.

Margaret was the fourth of six children born to Dr. Rudolphus and Margaret Sloan. Her mother, Margaret Spring Sloan, was raised in Dalton, Georgia, until she moved with her family to Tennessee, where she met and married Dr. Sloan following the Civil War. Rudolphus Sloan was raised in Norfolk, Virginia. He moved to Nashville, Tennessee to attend the University of Nashville as a medical student.<sup>30</sup> Following his education, Dr. Sloan volunteered as a surgeon in the Confederate Army.<sup>31</sup> Later he established his own practice and pharmacy in Chattanooga, Tennessee. There he and his wife raised their family. Though Margaret's family never achieved real wealth, her marriage announcement in the Chattanooga News suggests that the family was recognized within the city. The announcement claimed that she possessed "the advantage of fine family connections, being related to some of the best old families of South Carolina and Georgia."<sup>32</sup> Clearly, Margaret came from a family steeped in Southern traditions. Her experiences, however, took her beyond the ideals of these traditions.

Margaret was raised in a community that simultaneously took deep pride in its Southern heritage and its image as a new and prospering modern city. Following the Civil War, many Union soldiers settled in Chattanooga, Tennessee. As Harold Woodell cites, the "Chattanooga National Cemetery, established by a Union general in 1863, was by 1900 a source of great civic pride."<sup>33</sup> Yet, only blocks away lay a Confederate cemetery. Chattanooga metaphorically represented the diverse influences impressed upon Margaret. From her diary we gain a sense of her involvement in this community.

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<sup>30</sup> Woodell, 6.

<sup>31</sup> In addition to his work as a doctor in the War. Sloan advised General Braxton Bragg as to the likely movements of the Union Army prior to the battles of Lookout Mountain and Chickamauga. Cited in: Woodell, 6

<sup>32</sup> Margaret pasted the announcement into her diary entry on June 12, 1900. Diary of Margaret Sloan, June 12, 1900. Transcript: page 36.

<sup>33</sup> Woodell, 4.

Margaret commented on the lectures, plays, and operas that she attended, as well as novels and poetry she read. Her experiences in the community suggest that she absorbed new ideas of womanhood and considered her own life within these new paradigms.

For example, in writing about the play "Lord Byron" by Rida Louise Johnson, Margaret expressed her respect for female assertiveness in male-female relationships.

Margaret celebrated the main character's behavior, writing:

And Thursa [Thyrza], the Italian girl he loves and who loves him, comes to him, and they have the most natural conversation, then when she tell him how madly she loves him he is skeptical, but at last he is overcome by his love for her, and her passions and tells her they will love and be happy, life was made for love, and then commences that ideal love scene, in which he is grand.<sup>34</sup>

Margaret's praise of Thyrza indicates not only her interest in forthcoming and assertive female behavior, but also her attraction to freely expressed sexual and romantic desires. Female desire and assertiveness stood opposed to the passivity imposed by "true woman" doctrines. Margaret recognized Thyrza as making sexual advances towards Lord Byron, commenting that Thyrza came to him and told him her feelings for him. At the last minute, however, Margaret transferred sexual assertiveness from the female to the male character. In her diary entry she emphasized that Thyrza expressed her love first and initiated the couple's affair, but that Lord Byron was "grand" in the "ideal love scene." Margaret envisioned Lord Byron as the more active and aggressive participant, thereby respecting the gendered male character. Margaret seems to have desired greater freedom of expression, while still identifying with social ideals that saw men as the more aggressive sexual partner. By reflecting on the play, Margaret

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<sup>34</sup> Diary Margaret Sloan, February 27, 1900. Woodel, page 21.

demonstrated how her exposure to urban culture led her to question accepted standards female behavior.

Margaret's involvement in the community was a part of growing trend in women's increased participation outside of the home. The New Woman of 1900 had become more active in civic and social organizations. In fact, in 1890 the National American Women's Suffrage Association was formed, as were several other Christian and temperance organizations. Historians frequently identify involvement in associations, particularly missionary and self-help organizations, as having provided training grounds for future activists.<sup>35</sup> Though Margaret did not seem to have been active in these organizations, she knew that women were breaking free from domestic constraints. Attendance at lectures and plays appear to have brought her into contact with similar ideas.

Margaret was raised in a family steeped in Southern tradition, but within a community that to some extent welcomed change and modernization. Margaret's diary reveals her journey to construct an identity that incorporated the expectations of her middle-class family with the ideas she encountered in the city. Margaret's experiences in Chattanooga, Tennessee, allowed her to expand her world view. Though she first looked out onto the world from a middle class perspective, she departed from traditional gender standards. Margaret struggled to find her own meaningful role in society.

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Emmar Adel Croom was born in 1874. During her life she seems to have been known to her friends and family as "Emma," which is how she will be referred to here.

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<sup>35</sup> Anne-Firor Scott, The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930 (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 225.

Emma lived with her family near Pinson, Tennessee, in Madison County. She married Frank E. Robbins on September 1, 1898. In the year prior to her marriage, she maintained a detailed diary of her life as a twenty-three-year-old woman. Her diary describes church gatherings, visiting, quilting, parties, ice cream socials, buggy rides, and card games. The diary entries are straightforward and generally do not reflect the high degree of introspection evident in the other diaries. In recording the appropriate pursuits of a well-bred, young Southern woman, Emma Croom offered evidence of the slow and tenuous means by which change often came to the South. Still, Emma's employment, piece-work hat making, made her part of a larger movement of women's involvement outside the home. In the pride that she took in her earnings and personal autonomy, we gain a sense of her struggle to reconcile family expectation with her individual experiences.

Unfortunately, outside of the information in her diary, little is known about Emma Croom. During the Civil War her community, Madison County, is said to have showed "a remarkable unanimity for the South."<sup>36</sup> Jesse Croom, Emma's father, appears to be one of younger brothers of a William Croom, whom Goodspeed's History described as "a prominent citizen and farmer of Madison County" and a Confederate Veteran who served in the Thirteenth Tennessee Confederate Infantry during the War.<sup>37</sup> In addition, the 1880 census indicates that Emma was born to a large household, which included mother, father, seven siblings, paternal grandmother Sivil Croom, three farm laborers, and one servant, suggesting the family was of a relatively high socio-economic

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<sup>36</sup> Goodspeed's History of Tennessee: Madison County: <http://web.utk.edu/~ddonahue/madison/gsmad.htm#war>.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

background.<sup>38</sup> Emma was obviously educated, for she wrote well. It seems, based on this evidence, that Emma matured within a standard Southern family where tradition and heritage played a significant part in defining the women's role.

Emma, however, experienced culture outside of the family. She described her visits to Jackson, Tennessee, and her interactions with many of the merchants. Interestingly, Emma often mentioned one of the storeowners, Frank E. Robbins, whom she married on September 1, 1898. Mr. Robbins was recently widowed, Emma having discussed both his wife and baby's death in her journal. Born in 1867, Frank was about 31 years old when he married Emma. He had two children, a son Fordyce age five and a daughter Verd age three. Though the diary concludes before the wedding ceremony, a marriage certificate testifies to the couple's fate.

Emma's marriage to Frank reveals the importance of her employment outside of the home. Emma wrote in her diary, "She wants me to sell a stock of hats in Pinson. I went over to see about it. Mr. Frank Robbins is to let me have a place at his store to sell them."<sup>39</sup> In this passage, Emma demonstrates a degree of independence. She "went over to see about" some business and took responsibility for her own interests, a behavior that would typically fall outside of passive notions of femininity. In selling hats in town, Emma also joined an increasing number of women who entered the labor force.

Indeed, by 1900 a broader range of employment opportunities existed for women. The number of women working in the labor force had increased to twenty percent, a five percent increase since 1870. And the 1890 census listed 369

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<sup>38</sup> Her parents, Jeseo Croom of North Carolina and Nancy Croom of Tennessee, had seven children: five daughters, Florence, Mary, Cordelia, Lally, and Emma, and two sons, Willie and Louis. Emma was the youngest daughter, and only two years older than the baby of the family, Louis. "Jeseo," an unusual spelling by today's standards, is listed as such in the census. United States Census. 1880: FHL Film 1255270 National Archives Film T9-1270 Page 431A.

<sup>39</sup> Diary of Emma Croom, May 1897. Page 52.

occupations as being available to women. Granted, most women worked in “female professions” like teaching and nursing, but women also became actresses, worked in the textile industry, in food production, in cigar, tobacco, and shoemaking industries, and even as doctors.<sup>40</sup> So even though the New Woman occupied less prestigious and lower-paid positions than men, by 1900 she occupied a larger space in American society. By working from the home, Emma assumed a less threatening job. Her work, however, should still be viewed as part of a larger shift in the extent and status of women’s employment.

Beyond the experiences that accompanied Emma’s employment, questions also arise concerning the reasons for her labor. Why did Emma choose to make and sell hats in town? If she met a family need for extra income, her family’s wealth being less than it would appear, then Emma’s involvement should be deemed evidence of significant social changes. Emma’s family, though Southern by heritage, would have accepted income garnered outside of those traditions. On the other hand, if Emma’s employment fulfilled a personal desire for autonomy, her involvement outside of the home is evidence of the intersection of two very different notions of femininity. In either case, Emma’s employment is evidence of her contact with liberating views of womanhood.

Participation in the city allowed Emma to exert independence. In her interactions in town, Emma opened herself to new social opportunities. Indeed, she met her husband while arranging to sell her hats. In her diary, Emma for the most part concentrated on her behavior as a member of the family and society; she described appropriately female past times. But occasionally, when her writing shifted to describe

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<sup>40</sup> Banner, 8-9.



more adventurous outings, Emma wrote with pride about her interactions with friends and neighbors. She began an entry describing travel by train, "This has been Oh! such a lovely day. We sure got up early this morn to get me of to train."<sup>41</sup> The rest of the entry described her trip. What stands out is the pride and independence she expressed in her travel and autonomy.

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Polly Draper maintained a detailed diary of her daily life in Smith County, Tennessee between September of 1888 and May of 1889.<sup>42</sup> According to the 1880 census, Polly would have been around 21 years old at the time she kept the diary.<sup>43</sup> The thirty-two pages that constitute her nine-month diary are not dated, but rather written in continuous form. Throughout the journal, Polly wrote of everything from presidential elections to church meetings. In her writing, she vividly depicted the life of a young Southern woman, recording her social activities, church meetings, household chores, and family activities. From her diary emerges a picture of a woman who matured in a seemingly traditional household. Polly offers to this study evidence of how women immersed in family coped with the true woman ideology. Polly's diary reveals her consciousness of gender divisions. However, it does not provide evidence of any given point of tension as particularly having shaped her identity. Polly did not record attending school, spending time in town, or working outside of the home. She appears dedicated to the family and accepting of the woman's role.

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<sup>41</sup> Diary of Emma Croom, April 24, 1888. Page 48.

<sup>42</sup> Information provided in the forward provided by the Tennessee Historical Society. Manuscript: Polly (Draper) Langford Diary, 1888-1889. THS ac. #408.

<sup>43</sup> I have encountered some contradictory evidence. Polly maintained the diary in 1888, and the 1880 census records her as being 13 years old, which would have made her 21 in 1888. However, Polly commented on her sister Fannie having had her 26th Birthday in 1898, and Fannie was only two years older than Polly according to the census. Polly was thus somewhere between 21 and 24 when she kept her diary.

Polly lived with her parents, James and Lucy Draper, on Dillard's Creek near Chestnut Mound, Tennessee.<sup>44</sup> She was the fifth of seven children, including four sisters, Mary, Mourning, Fannie, and Elizabeth, and two brothers, William and James. Her father was apparently a successful farmer, as Polly's diary suggests that she was well educated and therefore of a comfortable background. In her writing, Polly primarily described her commitment to and concern for members of her family. She wrote of her father's ailments, her brothers' trips to town, her sisters' social engagements, and her help in chores around the home.

Polly's adherence to female pursuits like sewing, knitting, and home keeping prepared her for future roles as wife and mother. In addition, as is true with the other women, Polly's middle class background impressed the importance of women as meeting a distinct need in the family; women who stayed home and kept house conformed to an economic framework where men were breadwinners and women housekeepers. On one level, Polly consequently appeared the archetypical "good," non-threatening woman; she seemed "traditional," meaning that she accepted time-held assumptions about her role in the family. But as much as Polly encapsulated the behavior of traditional ideals, she also displayed the characteristics of the new age.

Embedded within Polly's accounts of her family were references to the outside world. Polly's journal discusses political elections and trips to town, revealing her interest in social and civic politics. While these less female subject matters do appear, they are outweighed by the frequency of domestic, and appropriately female, subject matters. This suggests that Polly struggled with her interest in what society deemed appropriately male topics; Polly's diary entries suggest that, at the very least, she

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<sup>44</sup> Tennessee Historical Society. Manuscript: Polly (Draper) Langford Diary, 1888-1889. THS ac. #408.

thought about, if not questioned and possibly rejected, the limitations impressed upon her by a static perception of the women's role.

Polly revealed her consciousness of gender role divisions and emphasized the disparity in behaviors available to men and women in the family. She wrote, "Sunday, every where was so muddy I did not go any where. Pa went to the M.d. Jim went to Uncle W.D. Mourning was writing. Fannie and I read novels, Mother was listening."<sup>45</sup> We can analyze Polly's writing in two ways. We can simply understand her disappointment in poor weather having prevented her from going "any where." Or we can understand that Polly realized the opportunities available to men compared to the opportunities available to women. While her father and brother went to town and visited with family, the women remained at home – relegated to reading and listening. Polly accepted the expectations of her - she maintained her diary and completed her chores. Yet Polly also recorded an awareness of interests outside the realm of supposedly feminine interests. She wrote, "I heard that Uncle Will Draper had sold his land. Uncle came down in the night and sit till bed time. he told Pa that he had sold he went back home that night and started to Wilson Co next morning to look him out a home."<sup>46</sup> In recording a conversation between her father and uncle, Polly suggests her interest in, or perhaps, concern for the event. Such behavior fell outside the notion of the private and domestic woman upheld in earlier time periods.

Because little is known specifically about the Draper family, it is difficult to assess those cultural influences that affected her most. The history of Smith County, Tennessee, however, suggests that Polly may have been influenced by both Northern

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<sup>45</sup> Diary of Polly Draper, page 5.

<sup>46</sup> Diary of Polly Draper, page 16.

and Southern traditions. In Goodspeed's History of Tennessee (1887), Smith County emerges at times as a vision of the customary Southern agrarian community.<sup>47</sup> The land was settled just after the American Revolution and stimulated a thriving farming community.<sup>48</sup> But Goodspeed's History also mentions that during the Civil War "there was a strong Union sentiment in Smith County." Apparently, due to the county's location inside Confederate lines, there were no companies of soldiers organized for the Union Army, as compared to twelve Confederate companies. This reference indicates that although 1, 200 men served in the Confederate Army from Smith County, the region had residents sympathetic to both the Union and Confederate cause. In addition, from the time the Union General George Crooks took command of the nearby city of Carthage in 1863 to the conclusion of the War, this region of Tennessee was occupied by Federal troops.

Smith County appears to have been far from the insulated Southern community of many deep-South regions. Its women may, perhaps, have consequently been more aware of social changes that made the traditional feminine ideal seem outdated. Nevertheless, Polly Draper displayed in her diary a sense of duty to family, as well as other characteristics common to the traditional Southern women, and an awakening sense of herself as an individual. Polly's diary draws attention to the difficulty of pinpointing the sources of tension in women's lives. Polly proves that women, regardless of background, did absorb changing ideas of womanhood. Even when their

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<sup>47</sup> The text describes the lands "rich and productive" limestone soil, which "on the highlands produce an excellent quality of tobacco." Goodspeed's History of Tennessee: Smith County History (Nashville, TN: Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1887).

<sup>48</sup> Smith County was settlement in 1787 by William Walton. Ibid.

backgrounds would suggest conformity to “true woman” behavior, women in 1900 demonstrated a greater orientation towards the self.

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Emily Anne Margaret Hughes brings to this study a different perspective. In contrast to the other four women, Emily Hughes was born and raised in England. She moved in 1881 at the age of 17 with her grandmother Margaret E. Hughes to Morgan County, Tennessee. During the six years that she lived in Rugby, her new hometown, “Emmy,” as she was called by friends, wrote thirty five letters to her close English friend Lucy Taylor. The letters vividly depict life in turn-of-the-century Tennessee, discussing the everyday chores and events of a middle-class woman.<sup>49</sup>

Emmy was born to William Hastings Hughes and Emily Clark in 1863. Emily Clark died shortly after her daughter’s birth. Emmy therefore lived for several years with her paternal aunt, Jane Nassau Senior, the wife of a famed political economist, Nassau William Senior, and a friend and hostess of such accomplished individuals as George Elliot. During this period Emmy received a good English education. But upon her Aunt’s death, Emmy followed her grandmother to Tennessee where she would be closer to her father, William, who ran a sherry importing business in New York.<sup>50</sup>

From Tennessee, Emmy maintained a long, intimate, and thorough correspondence with her English friend, Lucy Taylor. The letters reveal the trials and triumphs of Emmy’s adjustment to the more rustic environment of Tennessee. They not only speak of homesickness for friends, but also describe the many ways in which

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<sup>49</sup> Information on Emmy Hughes taken from the forward by John R. Debruyn. Dissipations at Uffington House: The Letters of Emmy Hughes Rugby, Morgan County, Tennessee July 5, 1881 – July 15, 1887 (Memphis, Tennessee: Mississippi Valley Collection Bulletin Devoted to Bibliography and Original Source Material - Memphis State University, 1975): 5-9. From here on in I will identify the date of the letters and page number of the citation.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

Emmy became involved in her community. The letters rarely talk of the financial hardships that Emmy and her grandmother encountered, but rather describe Emmy's experience teaching Sunday school, taking photographs, performing on the piano publicly, and her brief engagement to a local man.<sup>51</sup> In the letters, Emmy often described her displeasure with social customs. Her letters serve as a means to assess how educated, white women of more progressive communities and backgrounds perceived Southern social etiquette. Emmy emerges from her letters a woman somewhat removed from Southern culture, who judged her environment with an eye different from her peers in this study.

In particular, Emmy tended to write to Lucy of customs and behaviors in Tennessee that were either foreign to her or hindered her own personal desire for independence. Emmy seems in the letters alternately surprised, frustrated and proud that she challenged social norms. She wrote:

When father went away, he walked to the station, & I rode about 5 miles of the way with him to carry his bag. No one else went with us, & I came back at 10:45 p.m. I believe several people were rather shocked at my riding 5 miles alone at that time of night. There is a new club in rugby now of which I am a member, called the Musical and Dramatic Club. The Club House is quite close to us & is open from 10 a.m. till 11 p.m. Of course only gentleman go there in the day time, & ladies & gentleman in the evening.<sup>52</sup>

Emmy took pride in her independent behavior, emphasizing that "no one came with us" and that people were "shocked" by her being alone. Emmy's language reflects a personality that claimed independence as a defining part of the self. Indeed, throughout all of her letters to Lucy, Emmy wrote of her responsibilities and involvement in the community. She discussed buying land, farming, selling milk in a hotel, and teaching

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<sup>51</sup> John R. Debruyne describes the family's financial downfall. Debruyne, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Letters Emmy Hughes. October 4. 1884. Page 66.

church school.<sup>53</sup> The above entry, however, simultaneously indicates Emmy's acceptance of socially determined separation of the sexes. In referring to "The Club House" Emmy described rules of behavior that deemed women's entrance to the club during the day inappropriate. Emmy processed separation with less criticism than notions of dependence. A stranger to the South, Emmy described Southern culture with fresh but invested eyes. She saw the tensions between independence and true woman behavior.

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Young women in 1900 were raised according to older notions of womanhood, but simultaneously and regularly came into contact with the new responsibilities and privileges associated with less restrictive notions of femininity. Each of the five women in this study balanced family and social pride in "true womanhood" against their own desire for female independence. Historian Nancy Theriot claims that in the nineteenth century "female control replaced female suffering as the cornerstone of femininity."<sup>54</sup> When society allowed women to assume more control and agency in their lives, femininity expanded beyond prior definitions that emphasized weakness and passivity. As a new female ideal took form, women struggled with their anxieties and insecurities about their place in the family and society. These emotions became particularly evident in women's writing, which consequently at the turn of the century assumed new meanings and significance.

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<sup>53</sup> Forward by John DeBruyn emphasizes Emmy's involvement in the community. Dissipations at Uffington House: The Letters of Emmy Hughes Rugby, Morgan County, Tennessee July 5, 1881-July 15, 1887 (Memphis, TN: Memphis State University, 1975), 7.

<sup>54</sup> Theriot, 77.

## CHAPTER 2: Writing Identity: Duty, Expression, and the Self

Day for the Presidential election Pa and Jim gathered corn until dinner, then went to the election. Pa voted a Republican ticket strait out. Jim liked one month and one day being old enough to vote he said he wanted to vote in this election worse than he ever wanted to do anything. his sentiments are the same as Pa's. today is Fannie's birthday she is 26 years old today. the Republican candidate for Pres. Mr. Benjamin Harrison, Vice Mr. Levi P. Morton. Dem. candidate for Pres. Mr. Grover Cleveland Vice. Mr. Thurdman also Governors election candidates for Rep. Mrs. Sam W. Hawking De, can. for gov Mr. Robert Taylor.<sup>55</sup>

In 1888 when Polly Draper was 21 years old, she maintained a detailed diary of her social and family life. She primarily discussed quilting, sewing, household chores, outings, and family matters. But occasionally Polly also recorded affairs outside of the home. In the above entry Polly demonstrated her awareness of and interest in politics. She recorded not only her father's votes, but also the party affiliations of all candidates in both the presidential and gubernatorial elections. Interestingly, in the midst of the discussion Polly also noted her sister's birthday.

Polly's entry presents readers with a paradox. On the one hand, Polly the dutiful daughter maintained a diary, a function which in itself, as I will discuss later, met a cultural expectation of young women. In her diary she recorded her devotion to traditional gender ideals and familial expectations. And yet, on the other hand, Polly simultaneously seems to have struggled against limitations placed on her independence. The above entry, for example, suggests Polly's consciousness of her political impotence. Her discourse on the election includes an implicit comparison of her brother's and sister's disenfranchisement. Jim, age twenty, could not vote because he was one month short of legal voting age. Fannie, age twenty-six, could not vote because she was female. Polly's diary seems to raise questions about the extent to

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<sup>55</sup> Diary Polly Draper, November 6, 1888.



which she accepted such inequalities: Did Polly resent her brother's privileges? Did she desire the independence and rights granted to him simply because he was male? At the very least, the diary reveals that Polly thought about her place in her family and society, and that she used writing as a means to explore her discomfort with gender limitations.

Polly's diary entries reveal a young woman who struggled to reconcile a desire for independence, and perhaps even for influence, with the social expectations of women. I intend to examine Polly's, and my other subjects' diaries, as "working papers filled with tensions and controversies."<sup>56</sup> I will concentrate on the tension between the meanings that society attributed to diary writing as opposed to the meanings that diary writing came to hold for young diarists themselves. According to Jane H. Hunter, "Writing obliged girls to organize their daydreams or structure their self-scrutiny, to experiment with a voice that they could call their own."<sup>57</sup> In 1900, as images of the "New Woman" challenged the ideals of "True Womanhood," women began to construct personal identities that moved beyond rigid, one-dimensional notions of female virtue and womanly duty. Writing allowed women to construct identities that were diffuse, dispersed, imaginative and even experimental.<sup>58</sup>

In this chapter, I will locate turn-of-the-century diaries within a transition from the public and "self-grooming" diary to a more reflective and personal diary. Although my subjects' diaries possess attributes of older Victorian conventions, modern notions of

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<sup>56</sup> Jane H. Hunter, "Inscribing the Self in the Heart of the Family: Diaries and Girlhood in Late-Victorian America," *American Quarterly* 44 (1992): 51-81. Citation: page 53.

<sup>57</sup> Hunter. 52.

<sup>58</sup> Kate Flint suggests that female Victorian poets used verse as a means to "stretch both reader and writer well beyond the bounds of personal experience." Kate Flint, "Identity and the Victorian Poet," ed. Roy Porter (London: England: Routledge, 1997), 159.

femininity also encouraged them to claim writing as a place of experimentation. Balancing personal sentiments and societal dictates, young women used diaries as places to record intimate thoughts and reflections. Patsy's, Margaret's, Polly's, Emma's, and Emmy's diaries reveal how writing became a means for young women to nurture a consciousness of the self.

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Historians have long viewed diaries as valuable sources that reveal information about both the individual and his or her role in society. But in recent years, the diary has been increasingly recognized as a source of information about social structures, interpersonal relationships, and, of particular interest to this thesis, the construction of identity.<sup>59</sup> The historical diary, however, raises difficult questions concerning the purpose and function of writing: Why did women write? And for whom? It is important to understand diaries as a part of particular cultural contexts.

The meaning of diary writing today is far removed from its meaning in Victorian America. Whereas today diary writing is generally viewed as a private and personal practice, during Victorian times young, middle-class women understood diary writing as a mark of true womanhood. In the early and mid - nineteenth century, diaries were essentially public documents, written with the understanding that they would be shared with friends and family. By maintaining diaries young women demonstrated their acceptance of social and familial expectations. In writing for an audience, it was

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<sup>59</sup> Cynthia Huff and Suzanne Bunkers, discuss diary writing as a form of autobiography. Although Bunkers and Huff primarily investigate the diary's narrative structures, content, and form, they also propose the diary as a complex literary source, one that is "wide-ranging yet patterned." "adaptable and flexible." and "simultaneously elastic but tight." Suzanne Bunkers and Cynthia Huff, *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts, 1996), 17.

believed that women would reflect upon and reinforce their acceptance of gender appropriate behavior.

Margaret Sloan's diary reveals how the relationship between function and audience in diary writing shaped the meanings attached to turn-of-the-century diaries. Margaret disclosed her consciousness of audience, writing, "I will leave this record of my life from the time he [Willard] asked my Parents consent to our marriage up to this beginning of a new life with him."<sup>60</sup> By supposing her diary a "record," Margaret appears to have viewed her writing as a form of testimony. She revealed an awareness that her diary might be read by someone other than herself – perhaps by her future children. Her writing also includes her desire to meet society's views of the "good woman." Margaret wrote on January 1, 1900:

I won't write any resolutions, but I hope to do more for others, have better control of my temper, speak less against people, be more generous, more appreciative, and lives as I feel I should this year than I did last.<sup>61</sup>

By desiring to be controlled, generous, and appreciative - all attributes of ideal womanhood - Margaret reminded both herself and any reader of her devotion to proper female roles and duties. Margaret's diary, therefore, reveals the influences of cultural beliefs that sought to repress female emotions.

During the early decades of the nineteenth century, Victorian culture, indeed, allowed women a very narrow range of emotions. "Woman" at this time was synonymous with acceptance and docility, and the home was a haven in which disruptive emotions had no place.<sup>62</sup> A woman's magazine wrote in 1888 that, wherever

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<sup>60</sup> Diary of Margaret Sloan, August 21, 1902. Woodell, 220.

<sup>61</sup> Diary of Margaret Sloan, January 1, 1900. Woodell, 15.

<sup>62</sup> Peter Stearns, American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth Century Emotional Style (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 16-33.

a woman goes, "She will carry peace and create happiness – her influence will be ever essentially pure and gentle. She will know nothing of 'burning questions,' so she will not be able to discuss them."<sup>63</sup> The Victorian woman had "no ambition outside of the home" and in her most perfect form was "content to live in the shade of the home and a strong man's love."<sup>64</sup> "Burning questions," discussion, and challenge of any sort fell outside the realm of appropriate female behavior. Historian Peter Stearns has gone so far as to state that, in Victorian America, "Women especially were urged into a single, exiguous emotional mold: they must love, but they had no other legitimate emotional outlet. Anger, in particular, was denied them, and even fear had to be tightly controlled."<sup>65</sup> Diary writing helped to contain these "disruptive emotions" and became a means to check selfishness, to develop good character, and to encourage conformity.

Margaret's diary entries reveal attributes of the self-structuring form that defined public diaries of the nineteenth century. Her writing conformed to a tradition where writing built character and taught habits of order and regularity.<sup>66</sup> Margaret's diary, however, simultaneously reveals a departure from this older Victorian diary. By desiring to live more "as I feel I should this year than I did last," Margaret recorded an awareness of herself as an individual. Her diary had begun to evolve into a private place where she could process and validate her feelings and verify her observations. As the opportunities available to women increased and gender norms grew less rigid, women's attitude towards writing also changed.

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<sup>63</sup> "What a Girl Can Be," Woman: A Monthly Magazine February 1888) 222.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Stearns, 28.

<sup>66</sup> Hunter, 55.

The diary gradually became a more private forum in which women began to record their most intimate thoughts.<sup>67</sup> The repressive emotional culture discussed above led women to look for a safe and private place to struggle with anxieties, fears, and desires for independence; the very reasons why society viewed diary writing as an appropriate female past-time eventually led women to fight for the privacy of the written word. We can see in the diaries that women were beginning to treat diary writing as a “constructive technique of the self.”<sup>68</sup>

By allowing them to articulate an intimacy that direct conversation prohibited, to experiment with notions of their own sexuality, and to process family tension in a non-threatening medium, diary writing came to offer women a means to explore and construct a sense of self.<sup>69</sup> Historian Jane H. Hunter claims that Victorian diaries provided a means for young women to retain “familial ties without forcing girls to retain familial destinies.”<sup>70</sup> Diary writing allowed women to experiment with independence without subjecting them to the battles of isolation earned by autonomy.<sup>71</sup> In other words, the diary became a socially acceptable place to deal with emotions deemed inappropriate by society. Young women could process desires for independence without upsetting gender and power dynamics in the family. By treating their diaries as friends

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<sup>67</sup> I use “private” here to refer to the extent to which women used writing as a means of reflection. “Private” refers to intimate writing, as opposed to writing intended for an audience. The terms “private” in scholarship about diary writing is often confusing. It may refer to “bare-bones” documents in which the purpose, scope, and style of a piece of writing is limited. “Private,” in such cases, would suggest that the diary was written by the author and solely for the author.

<sup>68</sup> Hunter, 52.

<sup>69</sup> Hunter, 67.

<sup>70</sup> Hunter, 74.

<sup>71</sup> Hunter, 61.

and by claiming their writing as more personal and private, young women transformed diaries into sites “to amass fragments of experience into identity.”<sup>72</sup>

In order to provide for more conversational and intimate writing, young women gendered the diaries female and thereby forged more personal and reflective dialogues.<sup>73</sup> According to Suzanne Bunkers, “The diary was an especially useful medium for developing and sustaining close friendships because it embodied the trust and security characteristic of women’s kinship and friendship networks.” Young women took comfort in “bound friends,” who unquestioningly accepted confessions of love or resentment. Patsy and Emma, for example, described personal relationships with their diaries. Patsy actually named her diary “Jurney.” She opened her diary by writing:

My dear Jurnie: I missed writing so much after I brought my jurnel to a close and it gives me so much pleasure to keep account of what is going on around me that I have begun another.... I like this book much better than the other one. I think the stiff back is so nice. I did not like it very much at first. The other one is my first love so I will not say any thing more about this one.<sup>74</sup>

Patsy treated “Jurney” as a friend capable of being jealous, thus illustrating the extent to which she personified her journal. She also wrote, “Dear faithful old Jurney I can always come to you and tell you any thing I want to and you never say a word about it to any one.”<sup>75</sup> Patsy described a trusting relationship and valued her bound friend’s silence. Diaries, as friends, became media to record sincere and honest feelings of regret, anxiety, tension, etc. It seems that as women claimed the diary as a personal

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Suzanne L. Bunkers, “‘Faithful Friends’: Diaries and the Dynamics of Women’s Friendships,” ed. Janet Doubler Ward and Joanna Stephen Mink (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press. 1993). 13.

<sup>74</sup> Diary of Martha Peirce Graham, June 22, 1896. Transcript: page 1.

<sup>75</sup> Diary of Martha Peirce Graham, February 16, 1897. Transcript: page 65.

forum, and as their writing became infused with greater tensions, their narratives came to mirror the discourse between female friends.

At the same time, we can also see women's efforts to restrict potential audiences. As the diary attained more personal significance to the women, and as it came to be characterized by increased levels of privacy and reflection, women claimed greater ownership of its contents. Women became more self-conscious about who read their diaries. For example, as Patsy Graham wrote:

Anna is very much interested in my journal says she would give any thing to see the one I kept last winter but there is only one person in all the world that I would let read all of it you can easily guess who that one is but for fear you cannot I will tell you it is my own dear Carrie Lane.<sup>76</sup>

Patsy's entry reveals that, although she was willing to share her diary occasionally with friends, she viewed her writing protectively. For Patsy, the diary was personal and to be shared voluntarily. Patsy transformed her diary into a place to sort through tensions. The absence of the structuring elements of earlier Victorian diaries, the gendering of her diary female, and the narrowing of her audience suggest the new meanings women attached to writing.

Women's diaries shared similarities with the letters exchanged between female friends. Intimacy, reflection, and awareness of a limited audience defined both forms of writing. The letters exchanged between Emmy Hughes and Lucy Taylor read much like the narratives of turn-of-the-century diaries. Emmy wrote:

Since then we have had Helen Marshal staying with us for a week.... I liked having her very well but I must own I feel a great relief at being alone again, as there are very few girls that I feel perfectly at ease with. I'm afraid I'm peculiar, & we don't quite understand each other. I wish you

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<sup>76</sup> Diary of Martha Peirce Graham, July 17, 1896. Transcript: page 10.

would come and pay us a visit, as I think we always managed to rub along pretty comfortably together, didn't we?<sup>77</sup>

In writing to her best friend, Emmy revealed an identity that matured much like the identities other women nurtured in diary writing. Emmy's relationship to Lucy Taylor appears to have included the intimate feelings and open communication that Margaret and Patsy developed in relation to their journals. On one level, Emmy's letter reveals the nature of female friendship. It demonstrates the support and understanding that friends offered each other. But beyond that, Emmy's writing reveals that, in general, writing allowed women at the turn of the century to do more than describe the events in their lives; writing allowed women to deal with feelings like "peculiarity."

These feelings of anxiety and confusion arose from the tensions women encountered in their everyday lives. America was changing rapidly. Society's attachment to Protestant doctrines was weakening, the rhetoric and expression of Victorian culture were changing, and notions of women's and men's duties were becoming less concrete.<sup>78</sup> As a result, a woman could no longer depend upon a singular sense of duty as the foundation of her sense of self. Instead, women struggled with the expectations of family versus the opportunities of a more modern America. Women's sense of selfhood emerged from the negotiation of tradition with experience.<sup>79</sup> Diary writing in 1900 was the site of this negotiation; *The New Woman* asserted the right to reflect upon her life and to question and challenge gender expectations in a safe and private environment.

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<sup>77</sup> Letters Emmy Hughes, July 14, 1884. Page 64.

<sup>78</sup> Peter Stearns has stated, "Emotional intensity could be sought as an equivalent to a religious experience that many Americans realized was slipping away." Stearns, 69.

<sup>79</sup> Roger Cardinal demonstrated the shift from a "self" defined by "otherness," to a self inclusive of self-scrutiny. Cardinal posits the influences of travel in shaping personal identity during the Romantic Era. Identity, by the terms of Cardinal and Need, therefore, included the negotiation of old habits and traditions with new ways of thinking. Roger Cardinal, "Romantic Travel" ed. Roy Porter (London, England: Rutledge, 1997) 135-155.



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Diary writing, in all its complexity, offers historians evidence of the struggles women encountered in formulating a sense of self. Diary writing by 1900 had changed from a self - structuring medium to a less public and more introspective medium. In writing, women struggled to process new and apparent desires for independence with changing and stressful social messages. The diary served two very different and even contradictory purposes in late Victorian America: it reinforced female domesticity, but it also allowed women an outlet to express and process emotions forbidden in the home. Diary writing in Victorian America, therefore, became a place of experimentation, allowing women a modicum of independence. In their writing, women revealed that as they moved away from repetitively inscribing themselves as dutiful daughters, following set rules, they became increasingly preoccupied with the difficulties of interpersonal relationships. Young women at the turn of the century redefined the nature of both female friendship and courtship, weaving their reflection of contradictory messages about womanhood into identity.

### CHAPTER 3: Femininity From Within: Confusion: Anxiety and Acceptance

But Journey let me tell you what made me feel funny and all kind of other ways that was when we changed partners and instead of Mr. Dayman taking my hands as the others did the first thing I knew he had his arm round my waist ready to waltz me to my place. Did it stay there? Well no Jurnie it did not it made me feel like a perfect goose and I know he thought I was one. I have an awful case on Mr. Loucas. Just my luck to take a fancy to a married man.... Good night Jurnie do you think I have done any thing wrong.<sup>80</sup>

Patsy Graham was twenty-one years old when she wrote the above entry. Her writing reveals her insecurities and awkwardness with physical intimacy; she described how she felt when her dancing partner's arm did not stay around her waist, and she noted her "awful case" - what we today would call a crush - on a married man. Patsy seems to have been conscious of her feelings towards the opposite sex; "funny and all kind of other ways" suggests a physical and sexual response to intimacy. What is interesting is that she questioned her behavior, asking her diary, "Do you think I have done anything wrong?" Patsy may simply have been expressing her discomfort in normal flirtatious behavior, or, more likely, she may have been struggling with confusing Victorian social codes about sexuality.

Indeed, young women in 1900 entered marital age at a time when medical texts and prescriptive literature articulated repressive attitudes towards sex, but when an increasingly significant commercial culture provided women with new and less restrictive models of femininity. In part because gender ideology was not entirely monolithic, the reality of women's everyday lives tended to be more varied and to allow for a broader range of experiences than had been the case in the past. Womanhood in 1900 had come to include new assumptions of gender, making femininity, if not more complicated, than at least significantly different than past eras.

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<sup>80</sup> Diary of Martha Peirce Graham, August 15, 1896. Transcript: page 26.

This chapter uses diaries to explore young women's personal relationships with both friends and suitors. Through these crucial relationships, young women negotiated the difficult transition from youth to adulthood. During this period, the shift from Victorian to modern sexual mores became evident in two key respects. First, it is possible to identify ways in which the "female world of love and ritual" had begun to erode.<sup>81</sup> On the one hand, women still forged intimate and supportive relationships with each other. Yet these relationships, while still central to women's lives, also reflected the decline of a culture of "separate spheres." We see this in the growing self-consciousness and secretiveness that accompanied these relationships. Whereas Victorian women had rarely expressed anxiety about their relationships with other women, a subtle sense of uneasiness often permeated friendships around the turn of the century. This growing self-consciousness was itself a product of a heightened social awareness of female sexuality that eventually resulted in the stigmatization of intimate, same-sex relationships. In other words, as modern social codes increasingly brought women into conflict with their male peers, they simultaneously circumscribed young women's relationships with each other

Second, the rise of consumer culture translated into a shift from formal to more informal heterosexual relationships. In the books they read, magazines they perused, and products they purchased, young women encountered images of the active, healthy, and independent New Woman, who worked, played, and socialized with young men. This stood in contrast to the early part of the nineteenth century where men and women interacted primarily in restrictive and supervised environments. Heterosocial relationships, consequently, came to include ambiguities about romance, love, and

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<sup>81</sup> Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual"

intimacy. Young women still understood the importance placed on marriage, but also identified themselves as more active agents in love and courtship rituals.

As a result of these confusing interpersonal relationships, women's identities at the turn of the century emerged inclusive of tension and anxiety. In the opening vignette to this chapter, Patsy struggled with the normal sexual desires and interests of a healthy young woman, the remnants of a cultural orthodoxy of repressive sexual codes, and the newer social freedoms that young women now enjoyed. In dancing, Patsy celebrated youth, health, and motion, but she could not, however, waltz free from the confines of tradition. Her writing expresses her hesitancy, insecurity, and ambivalence in defining relationships to friends and suitors.

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The nature and meanings attached to friendship change over time. Indeed, friendship is a culturally constructed relationship that refers to any number and types of behavior.<sup>82</sup> Although women's friendships in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century did change significantly, love and support continued to characterize their relationships. Prescriptive literature in the 1860s reveals the extent to which society accepted and normalized intimate behavior between women. For example, in 1868 William Rounseville Alger, a Harvard graduate and ordained pastor of the Unitarian Church, wrote, "In their mental caresses, spiritual nuptials, their thoughts kiss each other, and more than the blessedness the world will give them is foreshadowed."<sup>83</sup> Alger's work epitomized Victorian thought; it described affectionate and supportive

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<sup>82</sup> According to scholar Pat O'Connor, friendships have different meanings throughout time. O'Connor cites the work of Contarello and Volpato who note that in France in the high medieval period friendship referred to solidarity between kin, but in feudal times it referred to relationships characterized by patronage. Pat O'Connor, Friendships Between Women (New York: The Guilford Press, 1992), 7.

<sup>83</sup> William Rounseville Alger, Friendships of Women (Boston, MA: Roberts and Brothers, 1868), 269-270.

female relationships in terms of religiosity and physicality. In writing of “mental caresses,” Alger suggested understanding and empathy as fundamental components of women’s relationships.

Alger also elevated female friendships to possessing almost divine-like qualities. He suggested the intensity of female friendship in terms of “spiritual nuptials” and “blessedness.” Alger revealed a pervasive tendency during the nineteenth century to use romantic language to express the nature of women’s interactions. His work reflected a world where female friendship was not only appropriate, but also accepted.

Historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has argued that Victorian society viewed devotion to and love for other women as socially acceptable and as “fully compatible with heterosexual marriage.”<sup>84</sup> Women in the early decades of the nineteenth century had not yet come to view human love and sexuality within a dichotomized universe of deviance and normality.<sup>85</sup> Because men and women interacted within strictly homosocial and gendered “separate spheres,” same sex affections were conducive to the current social structures. Women’s descriptions of their relationships with other women, therefore, unashamedly possessed sensually and sexually explicit undertones. This sentimental language, however, evolved around the close of the century to include new significance.

In 1900 society articulated an understanding of women’s relationships that seemed, at first, very familiar. One author wrote in 1894, “Oh the friendships of our girlhood! How quickly they are made and what a halo of glory there is around them.

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<sup>84</sup> Smith-Rosenberg, 59.

<sup>85</sup> Smith-Rosenberg, 58.

What life –long vows we made to each other.”<sup>86</sup> Female friendships resembled those of earlier decades - a “halo of glory” still surrounding women’s relationships. Several of the diaries examined in this thesis portray female friendships as passionate and integral parts of girlhood. For example, when Emmy Hughes described longing for her friend Lucy Taylor, she wrote:

You can’t think how welcome letters from old friends are. They are a great treat & I am always looking forward to the next English mail, but it nearly always comes with nothing for me, & you are the only girlfriend who still writes to me regularly. I hope we shall never lose site of one another, even if it is years before we see each other again. When I think of our happy life together, before we left Elm House it seems as if I were thinking of two entirely different people who lived years ago. How many happy days I have spent with you in the dear old Sweep.<sup>87</sup>

Emmy revealed the importance and centrality friendship played in her life. She celebrated the affections shared between two women, emphasizing the joy they celebrated in being together. The women’s separation, likewise, resulted in the termination of “our happy life together.”

A note inscribed on the inside cover of Emma Croon’s diary suggests similar close female friendships. The note reads, “You know that Old Alice loves you, don’t you? Will you, Can you, ever forget the many abundant hours we have spent together. May we always be friends is my wish.”<sup>88</sup> Like Emma, Alice described a relationship defined, by love and affection – one that she hoped would last always. Her signature inside Emma’s diary speaks to the nature of the women’s relationship, a concrete testimony to the intensity of their friendship. But beyond the passionate affections

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<sup>86</sup> Talks to Girls By One of Themselves, on the Difficulties, Duties, and Joy’s of a Girl’s Life (New York: E. & J.B. Young Company. 1894), 92.

<sup>87</sup> Letters of Emmy Hughes, June 25. 1882. Page 22.

<sup>88</sup> Diary Emma Croon, inside cover.

present in their writing, what the women also reveal is a shift away from physicality as a means to describe intensity and intimacy.

The women in this study tend to appear anxious about describing their relationships in terms of physically demonstrative behavior. In Patsy Graham's diary, we see the importance placed on privacy between Patsy and her roommate Carrie Lane Riggs. The two women became close friends while studying together at school. Throughout the relationship Patsy referred to Carrie with terms of endearment; she wrote of "My dear sweet Carrie" and praised her friend with accolades like, "Bless her dear heart she is the sweetest darling that ever lived."<sup>89</sup> But even though the relationship seems to have offered the women a means to express sentimentality, they were also guarded about their relationship. Patsy wrote in her diary:

I hear Miss Riggs voice on the porch I wish I could kiss her [Carrie] good night. We pass each other when we meet like we did not know each other but we make for it when we are by our selves.<sup>90</sup>

Patsy seems to have concealed her relationship with Carrie, or at least its true nature, from prying eyes. It is unclear what she meant when she wrote, "we make for it when we are by ourselves." But it does appear that, although physical intimacy played a part in the women's relationship, so too did secrecy. The young women did not perceive their relationship as suitable for the public to witness.

In a similar manner, Emmy Hughes wrote to her friend Lucy Taylor, "I wish I could give you a hearty birthday kiss, tho' I think neither of us were ever much given to kissing in general."<sup>91</sup> Although Emmy first described her emotions towards Lucy in terms of physicality, she reassessed her sentiments; she rethought and then denied her

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<sup>89</sup> Diary of Patsy Graham, October 23, 1896. Page 54.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Letters Emmy Hughes, January 9, 1884. Page 55.

desire. Kissing no longer seemed an appropriate means for the women to express their friendship. Patsy's and Emmy's entries beg questions about the nature of the women's friendships at the turn of the century, for they reveal that these relationships had come to include anxieties about intimacy and passion.

By 1900 women encountered confusing messages about the nature of women's relationships. Etiquette had shifted from encouraging to criticizing of female intimacy, and had begun to concentrate more on heterosexual relationships. What changed in women's relationships in 1890s was not, therefore, a lessening of love or intensity. Instead, we see that by the turn of the century society had come to view physical behavior between women suspiciously. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, society accepted female friendships as appropriate arenas of sentimentality and support. But by the twentieth century intimate female friendships had come to incorporate anxieties about female sexuality.

Prior to the turn of the century, prescriptive literature viewed most forms of female desire and sexuality as pathological. During the Victorian Era an ideology of female "passionlessness" meant that society was incapable of recognizing the potential for love between women.<sup>92</sup> Historian Lillian Faderman has written:

Because there was seemingly no possibility that women would want to make love together, they were permitted a latitude of affectionate expression and demonstration that became more and more narrow with the general sophistication and pseudosophistication regarding sexual possibilities between woman.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Nancy F. Cott, "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 4 no. 2 (1978): 219-236.

<sup>93</sup> Lillian Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1981), 152.



But as society came to view women as sexual, physicality between women became far less acceptable; physically demonstrative behavior between women now seemed to threaten men's dominance over women in sexual and social relationships.

The "general sophistication" of medical and etiquette discourse consequently included the expansion of those female behaviors deemed to be sexually deviant. For most of the nineteenth century, doctors had medicalized female sexual behavior, terming masturbation, eroticism, and nymphomania as "hysterneurasthenic" disorders; doctors defined the normal functioning of female sexuality by disease.<sup>94</sup> In addition, etiquette narratives from the same period reveal likeminded efforts to repress women's sexuality. Women were to assume the more docile and passive role in conversation and were never to exert their sexuality, as through overt flirtation.

Etiquette for Americans (1898) reinforced the notions of female weakness and passivity by speculating that women functioned best when society restricted their expressiveness. A chapter devoted to the "Rules of Unmarried Woman" suggested, "It is really a protection and a safeguard to hem them [with restrictions], and many of them are glad to be so protected and guarded."<sup>95</sup> The same etiquette book continued:

Girls should not adopt men-friends until they know more about them than such statistics as a superficial conversation in a ball-room or at a dinner-party affords. Many men relate their 'experiences,' and unfold their 'ideals' in fun, and to gull young and inexperienced persons, or to hear themselves talk. No girl should be allowed to make a stranger her friend.<sup>96</sup>

According to this discourse, women should not exert sexuality or behave in an assertive manner because in doing so she exposed her weaknesses to the stronger and more

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<sup>94</sup> Rachel P. Maines. The Technology of the Orgasm: Hysteria, the Vibrator, and Women's Sexual Satisfaction (Baltimore, MD: The John's Hopkins University Press, 1999). 36.

<sup>95</sup> Etiquette for Americans by a Woman of Fashion (Chicago and New York: Herbert S. Stone and Company, 1898), 197.

<sup>96</sup> Etiquette for Americans, 206

experienced sex. In general, nineteenth century medical and prescriptive discourse repressed female sexuality.

But by 1900 this literature had expanded to discuss the pathology of more specific behaviors – primarily sexual behavior between women. Prescriptive literature's increased concern with female sexuality translated into an increased consciousness and new set of anxieties about women's sexual behavior. The term "sexual inversion" became the accepted means to refer to a broad range of deviant gender behaviors, which included homosexual behavior.<sup>97</sup> In examining inversion, medicine drew attention to previously ignored arenas of female sexuality. For example, the renowned nineteenth century sexologist Havelock Ellis identified sexual inversion in women and claimed:

A woman may feel a high degree of sexual attraction for another woman without realizing that her affection is sexual, and when she does realize it she is nearly always very unwilling to reveal the nature of her intimate experience, even with the adoption of precautions...<sup>98</sup>

Clearly, medicine had come to recognize female friendships as possessing the potential for sexual love. But more importantly, what tends to underlie prescriptive literature's fears of female relationships is a fear of their potential to disrupt heterosexual relationships.

For example, one medical text (1900) recorded the story of a young woman, who in learning proper deference from male sexual attention, became "inappropriately" close to her friends. The text stated:

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<sup>97</sup> George Chauncey discusses the emergence of "homosexuality" from "sexual inversion." Chauncey also adds that inversion coincided with the emergence of medical theories concerning women's and men's biological and social roles, physical ailments, and sexual disorders, and was thus part of a logical system of assumptions about sexuality and gender. George Chauncey, "From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: Medicine and the Changing Conceptualization of Female Deviance" *Salmagundi* no. 58-50 (Fall 1982, Winter 1983) pp. 114 – 146. Page 129.

<sup>98</sup> Havelock Ellis. *Sexual Inversion* (Birmingham, AL: Classics of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences Library, 1990) 121-122. (Reprint of Original Version, 1901).

The young girls, thus thrown together, manifest and increasing affection by the usual tokens. They kiss each other fondly on every occasion. They embrace each other with mutual satisfaction... They learn the pleasure of direct contact, and in the course of their fondling they resort to cunning-linguistic practices.<sup>99</sup>

This type of behavior caused the “normal sexual act [to fail] to satisfy her.”<sup>100</sup> It seems that society deemed sexual behavior between women deviant and pathological, more officially as “inversion,” in order to codify her role in the home. Society seemed afraid that overly intimate or sexual behavior between women would jeopardize women's relationships to men.

An etiquette book of 1895 explicitly articulated this fear. The author wrote, “Then, too, by mincing up one's love as if it were a piece of citron, and giving a little of it here and a little of it there, there is left a portion not altogether desirable which is to be given to Prince Charming when he comes to claim his bride”<sup>101</sup> This narrative stressed the need for women to reserve their passionate love and desires for their husbands. The author continued:

I think it will be wiser if you make this good-fellowship, in number at least, one of three or five, rather than two or four, for then you will not be so likely to discuss your private affairs, or to reach a state of sickly sentimentality that is as undesirable physically as mentally.”<sup>102</sup>

Prescriptive literature reveals that society's increased emphasis on heterosociality meant the simultaneous erosion of women's friendships. Turn-of-the-century society was beginning to impose heterosexuality, even resorting to the amputation of a

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<sup>99</sup> Denslow Lewis, The Gynecological Consideration of the Sexual Act; and an appendix, with an account by Denslow Lewis, pioneer advocate of public sexual education on venereal prophylaxis. (Weston, MA: M & S Press, 1970), 13. (Reprint of Original Version, 1900).

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Isabel Allderdice Sloan Mallon, Side Talks With Girls (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1895), 122.

<sup>102</sup> Mallon, 126.

woman's clitoris as a treatment for inversion.<sup>103</sup> Eventually, as Historian George Chauncey states, "The medical profession's increasing concern about homosexual desire, and its differentiation of homosexual object choice from deviant gender behavior, represent[ed] both a reorientation of gender norms and a continuing imperative to define and delimit the range of acceptable social relations."<sup>104</sup> In other words, prescriptive literature's concentration on female sexuality meant a fundamental change in the nature of women's relationships – particularly with other women.

As society increasingly emphasized heterosexual relationships, female friendships became less permanent. Whereas in the past these friendships tended to be lifelong and an accepted part of the women's sphere, becoming an adult now increasingly meant severing intimate relationships with other women. The emphasis on heterosociality during this period consequently also seems to have meant that women refocused their emotional energies from women to men. Young women's friendships shifted to an arena for women to prepare and experiment with love emotions in preparation for heterosexual relationships. In other words, the intensity of nineteenth century friendships was replaced by a different kind of emotional intensity; passionate friendships allowed women to sort through confusing emotional and physical changes. Young women at the turn of the century treated female friendships as a trial ground for future heterosexual relationships.

The letters exchanged between women during this period of transition, reveal an emotional depth and desperation characteristic of passionate, if not erotic, heterosexual relationships. In 1903 Patsy Graham received a letter both lamenting and congratulating

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<sup>103</sup> Dr. Denslow Lewis deemed the removal of the "hypertrophied and excessively sensitive" clitoris as "justified" and "gratifying" in his treatment for sexual inversion in women. Lewis, 13.

<sup>104</sup> Chauncey, 146.

her on her marriage to William Dixon Sanders. The letter appears to have been written by a close female friend and was signed "Devotedly." In the letter the author wrote:

I am going to tell you first what I did yesterday when I got your letter. I read it and then began to cry and cried till my face and eyes were swollen until you could hardly recognize me then Gran and Jean scolded me and cried all "over again." Gran said 'anybody to see me would think I was sorry I wasn't going to be married too.' That was a fine way to wish you all the happiness that I really and honestly do. I just hope you will be the happiest wife that ever was. I am for once giving way to my extreme selfishness... and just hating to give you up worse than almost anything. I know you think that you won't change in your feelings towards me and will love me just the same but you can't and I'll be so lost without you... and two people that seemed to understand one another as well as we have don't always have to tell everything.<sup>105</sup>

The emotions expressed in the letter between the two women are reminiscent of emotions generally shared between lovers. Patsy's marriage meant the young women's separation, which, to her weeping and swollen-faced friend, seemed a tragic event. The distressed friend struggled with her fear of separation from Patsy, but also with the knowledge that marriage was an appropriate and expected part of adult life. Clearly, the author of the letter knew an intense relationship with Patsy; without her friendship, the author feared she would be "lost." Undoubtedly, a large part of the emotions the women expressed can be interpreted as a form of separation anxiety.<sup>106</sup> The women in this study reveal the grief with which they accepted separation from other women as they entered into marriage.

Following her wedding, Margaret Sloan recorded her sister's response to her marriage. By recording segments of "Gertie's" letter into her journal, Margaret

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<sup>105</sup> Unpublished letter to Patsy Graham post marked 1903, sender anonymous.

<sup>106</sup> Jabour discusses marriage and commencement as events in young women's lives during this time period as being particularly tragic. She claims that memory albums reveal the extent to which women lamented the loss of early relationships and feared the pressures and let downs of future relationships. Anya Jabour, "Albums of Affection: Female Friendship and Coming of Age in Antebellum Virginia." *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 107 no. 2 (1999)

demonstrated that she shared her sister's sense of loss. Margaret cited Gertie as having written:

We just will not allow our selves to think of the separation, we plunge right into work to avoid thinking about it. I could have just cried my eyes out Thursday morning when I passed through the rooms, and inhaled the heavy odor of the magnolias, and realized that she for whom all this was done, was far away, but I would not allow a tear to fall, went bravely to work to packing the dishes, and singing the wedding march, as it has rung in my head ever since the wedding.<sup>107</sup>

Gertie recognized Margaret's marriage as an important point in Margaret's life, but also as the end of their relationship as it had once been defined. Apparently, both women's fears were justified; weeks later Margaret entered in her diary, "Had another letter from Gertie, and they are uneasy about us, having failed to hear for over three weeks, but they have heard by now."<sup>108</sup> Marriage did indeed mean for Margaret and Gertie emotional and physical distance.

Society's emphasis on heterosociality, however, shaped more than just female-female relationships; the emphasis on hetosociality altered male-female relationships as well. The messages that prescriptive literature imposed on society were, in reality, quite different from the actualities of women's lives. The literature responded to fears in the rapidly changing nation and its potential for moral disintegration, and, therefore, restated earlier and more repressive notions of female sexuality.<sup>109</sup> Women and men during this period were, however, interacting with increasing frequency - their relationships becoming increasingly informal. In their diaries, the young women in this study revealed social and informal relationships with men. For example, Emma Croom wrote:

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<sup>107</sup> Diary of Margaret Sloan, July 11, 1900. Page 51.

<sup>108</sup> Diary of Margaret Sloan, October 7, 1900. Page 79.

<sup>109</sup> FULL CITATION. Walters, 10

Roy, Terry, and Arch spent the night with us. It clouded up and looked very much like rain again so we didn't look for him much and all of us went in Parlor had music waltzing by Roy and Alice George came at 8:30 and we all repaired to front porch. Arch to beat us out there tried jumping through from the window and there happened to be a nail driven here and there just outside and he happened to get stuck to several of them and they didn't 'timid go' till they had had severed the seat of the gentlemen's pants. We all had lots of fun at his expense and he repaired to back room donning a pair of tips. We played guitar and sang everything we knew then we began to get sleepy so we sang songs.<sup>110</sup>

Describing an evening socializing with friends, Emma also described a world defined by playful and even flirtatious interactions with the opposite sex. Men and women sang, danced and laughed together. As Arch tore his pants jumping through the window, Smith-Rosenberg's separate spheres, therefore, seem to have merged.

In light of such sources, the prescriptive literature discussed above, would appear to have been attempting to protect women from what was already happening in their lives; literature responded to the liberalization of social interactions by resorting to norms that no longer seemed normal.<sup>111</sup> Young women in 1900, on the one hand, still understood the social expectation of marriage, but, on the other hand, assumed a greater agency in their relationships to men. The diaries reveal the changing nature of male-female interactions, emphasizing not only women's comfort in heterosexual

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<sup>110</sup> Emma Croon. September 25. 1897. Page 93.

<sup>111</sup> Historical scholarship concerning this period identifies other intersections in society where was normal varied significantly from what was normal. For example, Nancy Cott claims that "passionlessness" "elevated sexual control highest among human virtues," making female chastity "the archetype for human morality. Historian Karen Lystra, however, argues that in the nineteenth century "middle class American women gave no private indication in an ideal of female passionlessness." Lystra recognizes Victorian sexuality as ambiguous and stressful, but argues against the notion of passionlessness. She cites women's personal love letters as revealing sexuality and intimacy, emphasizing that the "public-private division" had become a "basic organizing principle of nineteenth century middle-class culture." Lystra draws definite distinctions between what prescriptive literature suggested as appropriate behavior and how women actually behaved. I would argue that prescriptive literature's articulation of passionlessness may have elevated women as models of morality in the public specter, while women privately found socially acceptable mediums of romantic expression. Nancy Cott, "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 4 no. 2 (1978): 219 –236. Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press. 1989)

interactions but also their concerns and anxieties about the nature of these romantic relationships.

In a time when men and women were interacting more and more frequently, and often in less formal environments, society still however often clung to older traditions about social interactions. In Emmy Hughes' writing we realize the extent to which etiquette still governed social interactions. Emmy wrote:

The Kentucky idea seems to be that all young ladies & gentlemen can find no pleasure but in flirting so instead of sitting down to one table to supper they paired us off & stuck us in corners of the drawing room at little tables, making it necessary for me to make up & try to amuse my 16 year old companion. By the time the company went away it was 2 a.m. & I was almost dead. Can you imagine how anyone can find any real pleasure in that sort of "Society"? I can't. It utterly disgusted me.<sup>112</sup>

Emmy hated being forced "to make up" with her companion. In part, Emmy surely resented that her companion was a mere sixteen-year-old. But in addition, Emmy seems to have articulated her "disgust" with the prescribed form of male-female interaction. She described social interactions rooted in fixed ideas of female submission, in which women "amused" men and were not able to circulate or move about freely. Emmy's "disgust" was the product of an evening in which she swallowed her frustration at having her behavior restricted, and accepted, though resentfully, her role as a woman according to "The Kentucky idea."

When society's rules of behavior countered women's sense of freedom, women often articulated their dissatisfaction. In several of the diaries the young women express their confusion and frustration with social conventions that regulated their interactions with men. For example, Patsy Graham wrote:

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<sup>112</sup> Letter Emmy Hughes, April 15, 1885 Page 72.



Then what should that Tom do but take one of the girls and go for a walk and leave the other one for Mr. Hardaway to take care of so I did not see him but about twenty minets before they left my! but he was mad at Tom and so am I. Mr. Hardaway told me all about it. He asked me he would come after me if I would go home with him.<sup>113</sup>

Patsy's entry is interesting for several reasons: On one level, Patsy demonstrated her obedience to social expectations and referred to her beau as "Mr." Yet, on the other hand, Patsy seems frustrated with social customs that restricted her interactions with Mr. Hardaway. Patsy viewed Tom's behavior as having obligated Mr. Hardaway to entertain both women, when she wanted him to herself. She excused Mr. Hardaway's divided attentions since he was following the rules of social etiquette. But Patsy simultaneously acknowledged that Tom and his female friend had gone walking alone, without the chaperones of the earlier part of the century. She also made an ambiguous reference to going "home" with Mr. Hardaway. In other words, Patsy and her peers were interacting in a much less restricted environment than had been the norm decades earlier, yet they continued to follow certain values of politeness.

One result of this conflict was women's confusion concerning appropriate degrees of female expressiveness. In an earlier diary entry Patsy struggled with the desire to be more forthcoming in her intimacy with Mr. Hardaway. She wrote:

I am just crazy to let Mr. Hardaway know we are over here but don't know what I ought to do about it I am afraid if I write to him he will come over and maybe he would rather not come I don't know what to do about it I guess I will send him a message by Father when he goes to Pulaski this week I think a lot of Mr. Hardaway he is always so nice to me we are such good friends some times he does say "little bad sweet things" but I don't mind that would you if you were me and you thought him as nice as I do?<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Diary of Patsy Graham, August 10, 1896. Transcript: page 20-21.

<sup>114</sup> Diary of Martha Peirce Graham, August 3, 1896. Transcript: page 17.

Patsy wanted to see and speak with her male friend; in fact, she was “crazy” to see him. But she did not want to seem over-eager and, nevertheless, feared her behavior would be viewed as inappropriate. Even though Mr. Hardaway said “little bad sweet things,” probably in what we would consider flirtatious behavior, Patsy reveals insecurity about the nature of their relationship. Patsy lived in a world where social etiquette prescribed a rigid sense of female passivity. She, therefore, elected to send word by way of “Father,” because she understood society’s expectations of her. Patsy’s writing reveals both her desire for the freedom to express herself freely, and her resentment of customs that curtailed these interactions.

Young women’s resentment and frustrations in having their independence and expression limited was clearly at odds with the passivity prescribed by prescriptive literature. A growing emphasis on personal agency and expression pulled against older and more static notions of womanhood. By 1900 a new and overarching commercial culture challenged the weak and passive notions of femininity imposed by prescriptive literature.<sup>115</sup> This overarching commercial culture projected images of female health and independence. Three media in particular demonstrate the evolution of images of women. First, pop-literature included stories of female independence. The popularization of the press at the turn of the century facilitated the birth of pop culture and the dissemination of new ideas and images. During this period, literature, offered women alternative and liberating gender norms; the diarists in this study often encountered new ideas of womanhood in the books they read.

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<sup>115</sup> The birth of this commercial culture coincided with the birth of a national mentality. Whereas in earlier decades local cultures defined American modernity, the 1890s produced a more distinctly national culture. Local institutions functioned as a part of a more interconnected and global population. Lisa Duggan, Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 15.

For example, Margaret Sloan recorded in her diary that she read Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's The Gates Ajar, a phenomenal best seller.<sup>116</sup> It featured themes of women's independence and activism, telling the story of two women, Mary and Aunt Winifred. Mary mourned for the loss of her brother and struggled to define her personal understanding of heaven and God. She rejected her society's understanding of religion and built her own meaningful sense of faith. Aunt Winifred was the recently widowed wife of a minister. Phelps depicted her as loving and caring, but also as willing to challenge men's views on religion. Neither Mary nor Aunt Winifred fit within the mold of passive and docile women cast by prescriptive literature. While each mourned the loss of a man in her life, the two women lived together without a man.<sup>117</sup> Phelps's novel is evidence of commercial media that brought large numbers of American women into contact with empowering notions of femininity. Young women were clearly absorbing ideas of womanhood outside of passivity and repression.

In a similar manner, throughout the 1890s *Life* magazine published a series of drawings of women who would be called the "Gibson Girl." By portraying women as virtuous and chaste, but also athletic and healthy, *Life* presented an alternative view of femininity. The Gibson Girl was a simply dressed woman whose life centered around appropriate female pastimes, like love, courtship, and marriage. She was, however, also pictured playing tennis and bicycling.<sup>118</sup> This new portrayal of American womanhood, in which women celebrated improved health, stood in contrast to earlier views of female weakness. Femininity had come to allow for vibrancy and vitality. Historian Nancy

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<sup>116</sup> Woodel, 84.

<sup>117</sup> Elizabeth Stuart Phelps. The Gates Ajar (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964).

<sup>118</sup> Banner, 22.

Theriot confirms that, "The changing material conditions of middle-class women's lives challenged the idea of innate feminine weakness by allowing some women to experience health and strength as natural and attainable."<sup>119</sup> Young women at the turn of the century enjoyed better health than their mothers, understood their bodies as controllable, and therefore relied less on submission and self-denial as forms of identity.<sup>120</sup> So even though much prescriptive literature continued to portray women as weak, popular culture increasingly celebrated healthy and vigorous women.

Finally, a liberalization in styles of clothing coincided with the liberalization of morals. The turn of the century saw a symbolic shift away from the constraining corset. The corset had restricted women's mobility in both private and public spheres, codifying society's view of womanhood.<sup>121</sup> The corset limited women to her appropriate place in the home, while guarding women's sexuality. By abandoning the corset, society seemed to acknowledge the expansion of women's roles and privileges.

At the same time, clothing during this period increasingly became a means of self-expression. It was not until the Aesthetic Movement at the turn of the century that society came to formally view clothing as conveying a sense of personal creation and agency.<sup>122</sup> By 1900 society's views of clothing had, therefore, evolved to allow for both more liberal forms of style and more variance in personal choice in appearance.

All of the women in this study recorded an interest in their appearance. Patsy Graham revealed the extent to which she viewed clothing as a part of her identity when

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<sup>119</sup> Theriot, 89.

<sup>120</sup> Theriot, 100.

<sup>121</sup> Jill Fields " 'Fighting the Corsetless Evil': Shaping Corsets and Culture, 1900-1930," *Journal of Social History* 33 no. 2 (1999), 355 – 384.

<sup>122</sup> Mary W. Blanchard, "Boundaries and the Victorian Body: Aesthetic Fashion in Gilded Age America" *The American Historical Review* volume 100, issue 1 (February 1995) 21-50. Page 23.

she wrote, "I heard the other day that I dressed more like a child this summer than ever I tried at first to find out who said it as it was throwing off on me but now I don't care I just want the neighbors to know that I dress to suit myself and not my neighbors."<sup>123</sup> Patsy claimed clothing as uniquely hers, rather than as of concern to her neighbors and community. "I dress to suit myself" articulates her sense of self independent of family and society. But in addition, this passage may also suggest that Patsy rejected society's efforts to cast her into a more mature and adult-like role. Patsy may have rejected the image of Southern womanhood by literally rejecting her physical apparel, and seeking refuge in a more childlike form. In both cases, Patsy used clothing as a means to express herself.

When the new images of womanhood produced by commercial media clashed with older notions of femininity, the result was a cacophony of contradictory images that served to blur the once well-defined ideal of womanhood. At the heart of this conflict was the dilemma of where women's obligations resided – to themselves or to others. Even as women struggled with new anxieties about their relationships, their writings still echoed prescriptive literature's traditional notions of womanhood.

We see in women's writing a devotion, or at least commitment, to the social expectation of marriage. Prescriptive literature instructed women to formulate a sense of self by fulfilling their role in "conjugal love." An 1891 medical advisor included a chapter dedicated to marriage in which he identified love as a natural and even divine quality of women. The author wrote, "Again, Love is the sun of the woman's existence. Only under its influences does she unfold the noblest powers of her being... Every act which renders woman dear to us, denounces an idea and reveals the exclusive sacredness of

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<sup>123</sup> Diary of Martha Peirce Graham, July 7, 1896. Transcript: page 3.

her Love.”<sup>124</sup> Society expected a woman to construct identity from her “loving” role as wife. Only through this role would she realize her full potential as a woman.

The diarists by no means rejected the expectation of marriage. Not only did they scrupulously record friends’ weddings, but they also anticipated their own marriages as a matter of course. Even in the case of Emmy Hughes, whose early letters to Lucy Taylor reveal her avoidance of marriage, the wedding ceremony was eventually accepted as a part of coming of age. Emmy wrote in 1883, when she was nineteen years old, “Annie was only 18, & her husband 20. I can’t understand girls marrying at that age, for I hardly feel out of my childhood yet, & I couldn’t imagine myself going to be married. I suppose some people get older faster than others.”<sup>125</sup> Emmy viewed marriage as gateway into adulthood, a mark of maturity. She consequently may have rejected marriage in order to claim her youth. Yet, four years later, Emmy announced her marriage. She wrote:

I want to tell you a bit of information regarding myself, which I hope you may not have heard from anyone else. This is, that I am engaged to Charles Wilson, whom I have mentioned in my letters at different times. He is in British Honduras, doing government surveying ... I have not heard from him since I accepted him & had not intended saying anything about it until I did hear; but Granny wrote and told Uncle Tom of it, & I wanted to prevent your hearing of it in a roundabout way instead of from me... I don’t expect we shall be married for a long time.<sup>126</sup>

Emmy’s marriage announcement came only one letter after Emmy wrote that the women were getting “quite middle aged.”<sup>127</sup> It, therefore, seems that Emmy accepted

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<sup>124</sup> Ray Vaughn Pierce, The People’s Common Sense Medical Advisor in Plain; or, Medicine Simplifies (Buffalo, NY: World’s Dispensary Print. Off. and Bindery. 1891), 186.

<sup>125</sup> Emmy Hughes, October 3, 1883. Page 50.

<sup>126</sup> Emmy Hughes, March 16, 1887. Page 182.

<sup>127</sup> Emmy Hughes, page 78 (January. 24, 1887).

marriage as her entry into adult roles. Emmy's letter, however, also reveals her frustration that marriage would limit her freedom of expression and independence.

Emmy seems to have resented the circumstances of her engagement. Her writing suggest that she would have preferred to have communicated with Charles prior announcing their engagement. What permeates Emmy's writing is, therefore, a frustration in being controlled. Emmy told Lucy about the wedding because she had to; by announcing her marriage, Emmy felt her family compelled her to tell the people she loved about the future wedding (another testament to the commitment young women felt to female friendships). Young women, like Emmy, in 1900 seem, therefore, to have understood marriage as an appropriate women's role. They, however, also struggled with the realization of the restrictions that accompanied marriage.

Once married, young women in 1900 unfortunately often faced disappointment. They realized the constraints of adult womanhood and resented the concessions of their youth. In the year following her marriage, Margaret Sloan wrote:

I know that coldness and neglect from him will turn my love to hate, because I loved and trusted him so fully, believed that he would always love me above all else and think of my happiness first, and if he did this, then I would live for his pleasure, exert myself to make him happy, and he gave me every reason to expect lovely treatment at his hands, and when he is different and I ask him to be more considerate, and he pays no attention to my pleading, when it reverses my nature, brings out the worst that is in me, and I feel resentful, and love dies within my heart.<sup>128</sup>

Margaret had entered marriage with many hopes and dreams. Unfortunately, in the months that followed their wedding, her husband had an affair with a woman in the boarding house where they lived. In general, Margaret's diary entries reveal feelings of desperation that her marriage had failed to live up to her expectations; the man she

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<sup>128</sup> Margaret Sloan, October 4, 1900

loved seemed uncaring and inattentive. But what we should identify as historically significant in Margaret's writing is her juxtapositions of duty with a new and more modern sense of femininity. On the one hand, Margaret clung to a tradition of femininity as defined by her relationship to her husband. She wrote, "I do earnestly desire to be all to him he ever dreamed I would or all he expected, and I want us to love each other dearer than ever."<sup>129</sup> Yet, on the other hand, Margaret's emphasis on herself - her love, hate, trust, happiness, pleading, nature, and heart - were the product of a national shift away from older notions of female passivity and submission.

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The nature of American womanhood changed in years surrounding the turn of the century. Fifty years earlier, Southern society had projected clear ideas about what made a good woman. Women understood her primary role as a dutiful wife, mother, and daughter. At the same time, women understood society's delineation between the sexes and consequently forged social relationships with other women. But as newer cultural trends emerged, images of women assumed new forms. Prescriptive literature at the turn of the century reacted to the rapidly changing society by articulating older notions of female sexuality. Meanwhile, a new commercial culture projected images of healthy and active women. Women's consciousness of both cultural ideas of femininity meant fundamental changes in women's interpersonal relationships. In general, young women in 1900 negotiated the space between older and newer notions of womanhood, and incorporated the tension between these two opposing cultural imperatives as they shaped their identities.

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<sup>129</sup> Margaret Sloan, June 29, 1902. Page 260.



## CONCLUSION:

In studying women's history in the United States, we are familiar with images of the southern belle, the Victorian lady, and the suffragist. What we lack, however, are images of more ordinary American women. In the years framing the transition from the "True Woman" of the nineteenth century to the "New Woman" of modern American, a unique American figure took form. This new American woman embodied the cultural ideologies of two eras; coming of age on the cusp of two centuries, she wove the "old" and the "new" into what would be a complex and variegated identity.

The daily experiences of women in 1900 included the intersections of "true" and "new" women ideologies. The turn of the century witnessed both nostalgia for the traditional woman of the Victorian Era, and a simultaneous liberalization of social ideas about womanhood. Society and family proffered competing messages about the woman's role. Young women could, therefore, no longer depend upon monolithic notions of womanhood to define their senses of self. The erosion of a clear sense female duty meant that women struggled with, and made decisions about, what they deemed appropriate behavior. In other words, the widening gender ideologies of 1900 produced a more reflective and self-oriented woman; women internalized the anxieties and reflections that resulted from their struggles with notions of womanhood.

The women examined in this thesis reveal personal struggles resulting, in particular, from the changing nature of female sexuality. A wider range of possibilities existed concerning the nature of women's sexuality in 1900. The shift from the "passionless" woman to a more sexual woman in 1900 made womanhood more ambiguous. No longer only pure and passive, women redefined notions of their own

sexuality. The collapse of rigid separate male and female spheres meant that women's daily lives strayed from the repressive models of femininity articulated in prescriptive literature. Even as medicine, science, and etiquette suggested the frailty and passivity of women, improvements in women's health and a growing emphasis on physical activity brought women into contact with feelings of vitality.

At the same time, an increasingly significant national consumer culture also projected images of womanhood that challenged traditional notions of femininity. Although community traditions remained powerful in rural and less urbanized areas of the country, new technologies, more communication, and transportation meant the rise of a national modernity.<sup>130</sup> The objects and ideas projected by this new culture provided women with alternative means to construct their identities. In addition, consumerism also led to a transformation from suffering as the cornerstone of femininity to control and independence as a component of women's identity.

In general, this newly empowered American woman challenged a range of social and cultural traditions. She begged questions about the nature of female friendships, posing questions about the appropriateness of physicality between women. She asked for increased freedom of expression in her relationships to men. And, finally, she challenged her powerlessness and desperation in marriage. As a result of these behaviors, women in 1900 began to fold feelings of tension into identity. Consequently, we can see the rise of the interiority of women's identity. Instead of fashioning identity from devotion to a "woman's role," women negotiated broadening gender ideologies. Although women had not yet developed a public voice of dissidence, 1900 saw the incorporation of struggle, challenge, and frustration into women's identity. In their

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<sup>130</sup> Duggan, 14.

writing, women reveal this newfound voice – the product on increased reflection about the women's role.

I was originally attracted to these women's diaries, because I identified with the confusion underlying their entries. The women preserved in their writing distinct fears, frustrations, and apprehensions. At first, I thought their diaries told a relatively universal coming of age story. Adult roles, friendships, marriage, dating, and sex seemed appropriate points of tension in women's lives. But as I became more familiar with their lives, I realized that the diarists told a far more important story; Margaret, Patsy, Emmy, Emma, and Polly echoed the broader changes of American culture at the turn of the century. In their daily interactions with friends and suitors, these women negotiated tradition and change as a fundamental part of womanhood.

Throughout history women have, and will, experience the stress between social and cultural ideologies. Bettina Aptheker has suggested that stories “transform our experiences into ways of knowing – about ourselves as women and about ourselves as women looking at the world.”<sup>131</sup> Coming of Age is difficult, and it is my hope that by reconstructing how young women at the turn of the century created a self, I will heighten a consciousness of how we as women today and in the past define ourselves. I take interest in the journeys these women navigated to come to an understanding of themselves as individuals. The five young women in this study reveal that though immersed in Southern culture, they were not immune to the changes of a New Era. The

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<sup>131</sup> Bettina Aptheker, Tapestries of Life: Women's Work, Women's Consciousness, and the Meaning of Daily Experience. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989) 43 cited by Suzanne L. Bunkers in “ ‘Faithful Friends’: Diaries and the Dynamics of Women's Friendships” in the anthology: Janet Doubler Ward and Joanna Stephens Mink in Communication and Women's Friendships: Parallels and Intersections in Literature and Life, (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Press, 1993) 9

trials young women surmounted in Coming of Age in 1900 were incorporated into a new national notion of femininity – one the allowed for progress and independence.

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### Afterward: My Final Entry

Throughout the process of writing this thesis, I was often reminded by my peers not to overly identify with the diarists. Justin would complain that I used “I” too frequently. So many times I wanted to scream, “But don’t you get it? This thesis is about me.” I came to realize, that I began this thesis for all the wrong reasons. I thought that if I could figure out what Coming of Age meant in 1900, I could figure it out now – in 2000. Writing a thesis was really only a shallow excuse for trying to figure out my own life. Ironically, I hoped that writing would help me to process much of my own confusion and anxiety.

But once I managed to detach myself from my great-grandmother, I was able to think more historically. I had to come to realize that as much as we share in common – far more comes between us. I used to think that femininity was something universal that would bind generations of women together eternally. Patsy, her daughters, my mother, and I would have intrinsically understood each other by nature of our sex. Now I realize that the nature of social history, is identifying difference as much similarity.

So how are my diarists and I alike? We each struggle(d) with Coming of Age. We ask(ed) questions – and struggl(ed) with the answers. And how are we different? We asked different questions. I struggle with the vague and somewhat frightening road ahead of me. But the path before me seems imposing because it offers me a vast array of possibilities. Graduate school? Law school? Marriage? Motherhood? I am not sure what I want – and all is possible. This was not the world my diarists encountered. The anxieties Patsy, Emmy, Emma, Polly, and Margaret knew were the product of their distinct cultural environment.

I don’t know whether identifying with the women inhibited my ability to write about them or not. Sometimes I think I could have been more insightful, had I not been so lost. Had I looked for the answers to their lives and not my own, perhaps I would have revealed a more significant truth. But then again, perhaps my desire for answers led me in the right directions. Regardless, I am glad I took on this project. I haven’t found the answers to what constitutes love or friendship. I know I wasn’t supposed to. Life would be too easy if books, articles, and old documents could reveal the solutions to all our little mysteries. But I have learned something far more important; I learned how to think and to have confidence that I saw something – perhaps something insightful – in the diaries.

## Acknowledgements

Be it a novel, dissertation, or thesis, the support of family and friends is a fundamental part of the writing process. Having completed the final project of my undergraduate career, I now look back on the last three semesters with gratitude. My growth as a student, and woman, has been dependent on the love and criticism of many people. This thesis was for me the most important part of my college experience, and I wish to thank those people who made it an enriching experience.

First and foremost, I thank those faculty members who have dedicated their time to working with me. Professors Rebecca Plant, Arlene Tuchman, and Katie Crawford, I am grateful for your consistent support and assistance.

I am also grateful to my peers in the senior seminar who have challenged me to think in directions I might not have taken.

Beyond the classroom, I thank my friends – who have grown accustomed to the “dork” I have become. To those who joked that thesis became “the is” in my life, and to those who understood when I went home a little earlier than usual, you have made this process all the more easy. To name a few, I thank: Jamie Marcus, Annie Dieckman, Karen Wang, Steve Lee, Justin Holmes, Adam Gintis, Jacob Grier, Ryan Holmes, Haruko Koyama, Shane Cadden, and Jon Brown.

Finally, my education has been the gift of my family. I am ever so grateful for having been given the opportunity to write this thesis. A long time ago, you promised me the opportunity to go to any college I got into. I am grateful for all that you gave up so that I could have this experience. Matt, Grandma, Grandpa, and especially Mom and Dad – Thank you. All that I have accomplished is because of your love and support.