

GENDERED PERSPECTIVES OF THE REVOLUTIONARY ERA: AN ANALYSIS
OF SELECTED WOMEN'S WRITINGS, 1763-1800

By

ALISA JEAN WADE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of History

MAY 2009

To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the thesis of Alisa Jean Wade find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

Jennifer Thigpen, Ph.D., Chair

Richard Hume, Ph.D.

Matthew Sutton, Ph.D.

GENDERED PERSPECTIVES OF THE REVOLUTIONARY ERA: AN ANALYSIS
OF SELECTED WOMEN'S WRITINGS, 1763-1800

Abstract

By Alisa Jean Wade, MA
Washington State University
May 2009

Chair: Jennifer Thigpen

This thesis examines published writings authored by fifteen literate American patriot women in the North between the years of 1763 and 1800—including letters, journals, and memoirs—to determine what they chose to write about and how they expressed themselves. Incorporated into the research are writings of women of varying social backgrounds, locations, race, and age, in order to comparatively assess the ways in which women's lives in America, both domestically and publicly, were shaped by their historical context. A primary focus is to explore the interaction between the domestic world and public affairs that served to create the backdrop in which these numerous and significant female authors lived and wrote.

Chapters One and Two investigate female domestic life in the years between 1763 and 1800, identifying and categorizing matters of importance to women writers. In particular, Chapter One quantifies and analyzes themes pertaining to courtship, marriage, childbirth, and motherhood in order to ascertain the ways in which women remained within—and rose above—patriarchal expectations. Chapter Two assesses domestic tasks, illness, and death, noting patterns of female behavior—the administration of the family economy, decisions of whether or not to entertain guests, or inoculation, for instance—

that allowed women to assert personal authority. Seeking to extrapolate the nature of the female exchange network in the North, Chapter Three discusses intimate homosocial ties and the means by which friendship, religion, reciprocal expectations of letter writing, and the female surveillance of gender roles served as a bridge between private and public life. Lastly, Chapter Four broadens the focus from concerns related to domestic interests to the reactions of women toward the changing political climate around them, arguing that female writings not only reflect an adept understanding of economics, local, and national political events, but the clear development of a civic consciousness as well.

.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. “THE MARRIED WOMAN CARETH FOR THE THINGS OF THE WORLD”: FEMALE RITUALS OF MARRIAGE AND MOTHERHOOD	14
Courtship and Marriage	15
Motherhood.....	38
3. “SO MUCH FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT”: THE EIGHTEENTH- CENTURY FEMALE DOMESTIC EXPERIENCE	58
Domesticity	58
Illness and Death	70
4. “THE SISTER OF MY HEART”: HOMOSOCIAL FEMALE TIES OF INTIMACY IN THE REVOLUTIONARY ERA.....	88
The Female Letter-Writing Network	89
Intimate Friendship.....	100
Reinforcing Gender Roles	113
5. “NO SMALL SACRIFICE TO THE PUBLIC”: WOMEN AND POLITICS DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION	123
Politics and the Domestic World	124
Public Politics	137
6. CONCLUSION	149
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	154

LIST OF TABLES

1. Birth Statistics per Household	41
---	----

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“Until recently,” historians Joy Day Buel and Richard Buel, Jr. write in *The Way of Duty: A Woman and her Family in Revolutionary America*, “the history of roughly half the Americans who have lived, the female half, was almost a blank.”¹ While in the last twenty years a growing interest in gender history has sparked a wealth of fascinating scholarship on American women, these new works in no way offset the abundant historical attention given to the “great men” of the Revolutionary Era. The traditional narrative of the American Revolution still fails, in many ways, to provide a proper account of eighteenth-century female life, trivializing or wholly overlooking the daily activities of this entire segment of the population.

In her influential text *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, Linda Kerber has noted that “the ‘real’ story of the Revolutionary years has been thought to lie in accounts of battles or constitutional conventions—events from which women were necessarily absent—and women’s work has been treated as service to men, women’s words treated as trivial.”² My research seeks to address this deficiency by concentrating on the ways in which women transcended the separation between the domestic world they were expected to inhabit and the swiftly changing political realm. By examining published writings authored by fifteen literate American patriot women residing in the North between the years of 1763

¹ Joy Day Buel and Richard Buel, *The Way of Duty: A Woman and Her Family in Revolutionary America* (New York: Norton, 1984), xi.

² Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1980), xi.

and 1800, including letters, journals, and memoirs, this thesis explicates what they chose to write about and how they expressed themselves.³ A primary focus is to explore the interaction between the domestic world and public affairs that served to create the backdrop in which these significant female authors lived and wrote. Most importantly, my research demonstrates that historical understandings of a distinct divide between the female private realm and that of politics prove to be flawed; instead, these “separate spheres” must be conceived of as inseparably connected and mutually significant to the female Revolutionary experience.

The topic of women’s roles in Revolutionary America has been explored by many notable women’s historians. Mary Beth Norton’s *Liberty’s Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*, for instance, serves as a seminal study of the changing patterns of female life over the course of the Revolution. Likewise, Carol Berkin’s *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for American* is a vital resource in understanding the wide range of female involvement in the American Revolution, its focus stretching from a discussion of women who contributed in the nonimportation movements to those who participated in the spying and other sorts of intrigue that marked the Revolutionary War period. Nancy Cott’s *The Bonds of Womanhood: “Woman’s Sphere” in New England, 1780-1835* and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* assess the paradoxical bonds that served both to unite eighteenth-century women in close-knit sisterhood and, simultaneously, to hold them down, while Linda Kerber’s *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* and Jan Lewis’ *The*

³ I have chosen to geographically limit this study to patriot women of the North. This is not due to the inaccessibility of southern women’s writings for the period—there are several notable female diarists and letter writers in the South as well—but rather to restrict the length of this thesis.

Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia explicate the effects of republican ideology upon numerous important themes intertwined within the female experience, including politics, education, and citizenship.

My research builds upon the previous historiography in order to explicate the ways in which women both remained within socially-accepted structures of gender behavior, particularly in terms of their actions relating to marriage and motherhood, and at the same time implemented various means—both domestic and overtly political—to transcend such boundaries. As such, expected gender divisions inherent within the concept of “separate spheres” provide an incomplete explanation of women’s behavior as they do not take into account the fluidity of the female role during the Revolutionary Era. Chapter One provides discussion of two near-universal female rituals of the Revolutionary Era: marriage and motherhood. Female writings of the period indicate that conventions governing patterns of marriage were beginning to slowly shift. Those of this study saw a lessening of parental control in courtship and the increase of marriage based upon romantic ideals rather than economic concerns. However, while these women employed a degree of personal control in their choice of a husband, overwhelming adherence to prescribed patterns of marriage and motherhood demonstrate that such themes oftentimes reinforced colonial patriarchy.

Chapter Two offers an analysis of the female domestic experience of the late eighteenth century. Significantly, unlike marriage and motherhood, household tasks, treatment of illness, and reactions to death provided women with an avenue by which assert their position within the familial structure. Women developed a great sense of pride in their work and understood it to be imperative to the success of the family

economy. Equally important during the period of the American Revolution was the fact that the women of this study developed a large degree of personal domestic freedom, enabling them to make their own decisions on tasks ranging from the ordering of daily chores, the entertainment of guests, and farming to aiding in a husband or child's recovery from illness.

The female homosocial ties of intimacy that so closely bound women of the Revolutionary Era together serve as the focal point of Chapter Three. Sisterhood, for those of the period, offered several notable methods by which women could venture beyond the domestic domain and into the public world. By engaging in the female letter-writing network, women openly discussed and analyzed social and political events, literature, philosophy, and religion without fear of recourse. Equally significant, the surveillance of gender roles—female regulation of social conduct through gossip and intimate letter writing—provided for women the opportunity to monitor female behavior within the homosocial female network of exchange and, as a result, to define their personal position within the Revolutionary social structure.

The final chapter of this thesis deals specifically with the ways in which the fifteen women of this study understood and chose to write about Revolutionary Era politics. While women most commonly experienced the public world within the context of domesticity, behaviors considered private—spinning cloth, tea drinking, and entertaining guests, for example—became highly politicized during the period and allowed women to publicly assert their patriotism. Furthermore, the female letter-writing network was often employed as an avenue by which to promote the virtues of patriotism, discuss and analyze specific political events, and openly voice anti-British feelings.

Contrary to many commonly held notions of women during the eighteenth century, I would argue that female writings reflected an adept understanding of economics, local, and national political events. While there did not exist a universal female experience during the period, the women of this study demonstrate that many of the common patterns of domestic and political behavior that emerged offered women opportunities to assert their familial position and patriotic ideologies. In fact, during the years of the American Revolution, the writings of these fifteen women indicate that the female domestic realm and the political world became notably and inseparably entwined, affording women the opportunity to implement several notable means—the female letter-writing network, non-importation, non-consumption, and the management of the family economy, for example—as a conduit between the private “woman’s sphere” and the seemingly distant public world.

In order to best understand women’s written responses to domestic affairs and political events during the Revolutionary Era, it is first important to situate them within their historical framework. Numerous characteristics define the women included in this study; however, one of the most important parameters for the purposes of this thesis is that of region. All fifteen women identified in my research were born or spent most of their lives in the northern colonies in the years prior to, during, and immediately following the American Revolution. Nearly all fifteen women lived in urban centers in the North, including Boston, New York City, and Philadelphia. Only one, Esther Edwards Burr, spent any significant time in Stockbridge, a rural region. Five of the women in this study—Abigail Adams, Sarah Livingston Jay, Judith Sargent Murray, Mercy Otis Warren, and Phillis Wheatley—could be defined as notable women during

the period. The names of the ten others—Hannah Adams, Sarah Franklin Bache, Abigail Abbot Bailey, Esther Edwards Burr, Jemima Condict, Sarah Hodgkins, Nancy Shippen, Margaret Hill Morris, Esther DeBerdt Reed, and Sally Wister—are far less recognizable. However, in the case of all fifteen women, the region in which they lived largely served to define their political experiences during the Revolutionary period.

Seven women lived in Massachusetts. Of these seven, three inhabited Boston, a place of significant historical importance in the years leading up to the Revolutionary War, for an extended period of time. The birthplace of the Sons of Liberty, Boston quickly developed into a nucleus of patriot crowd activity.⁴ British soldiers quartered in the port city quarreled continuously with patriot civilians over jobs, food, and other supplies; Edward Countryman has argued that “In Boston especially the needs of the soldiers clashed with the ways of the townsfolk.”⁵ Nearly all patriot pamphlets were printed on Boston presses, and both the Boston Massacre of 1770 and the Boston Tea Party in 1773, seminal events in the years prior to the Revolution, occurred along the waterfront of the city.⁶

Each of these female Boston residents saw and experienced the events of their hometown in a very personal way, and each incorporated the events that occurred into their journals and letters. Abigail Adams, born in Weymouth, Massachusetts on November 11, 1744, moved to both Braintree and Boston, Massachusetts following her marriage to future American president John Adams in 1764. Even after John traveled to Philadelphia for the First Continental Congress, Adams continued to raise her four

⁴ Jack P. Greene et al., *Society, Freedom, and Conscience: The American Revolution in Virginia, Massachusetts, and New York*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1976), 79.

⁵ Edward Countryman, *The American Revolution*, Rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 88.

⁶ Benjamin L. Carp, *Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 24.

children there on her own.⁷ Although born in Gloucester, Massachusetts, in 1751, Judith Sargent Murray also moved south to Boston following her marriage to Reverend John Murray in 1793.⁸ Phillis Wheatley, too, spent her life in Boston.⁹

The remaining four residents of Massachusetts were spread throughout the colony. Hannah Adams, a distant cousin of John Adams, lived in Medfield, Massachusetts until her death on December 15, 1831, and Esther Edwards Burr, born on February 13, 1732 in Northampton, resided for her adult life in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, a town on the New York border.¹⁰ Sarah Hodgkins spent most of her life with her family in Ipswich, Massachusetts, and Mercy Otis Warren, female historian of the American Revolution, moved to Plymouth, Massachusetts with husband James Warren in 1754, where they lived until her death in 1814.¹¹

Of the remaining eight women, four were located in Philadelphia, another northern urban center in the era prior to the Revolution. Although it was one of the last colonies to vote in favor of independence in 1776, Pennsylvania played an essential role in the years between 1763 and 1800. A traditionally Quaker City, conservative Philadelphia residents continued to support Britain until the early 1770s, when many of their congressional members rallied to support Boston's tea boycott following the Boston Port Act.¹² In fact, one of the most important pieces of anti-British propaganda in the years prior to the Revolutionary War, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, was authored in the city. As Benjamin L. Carp has noted, "during the Revolutionary era, Philadelphians

⁷ John A. Garraty, Mark C. Carnes, and American Council of Learned Societies., *American National Biography*, 24 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), no. 1: 65.

⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 16: 161-62.

⁹ Wheatley, born in Gambia, Africa, was enslaved as a child and sold in 1761 to John and Susanna Wheatley, Boston residents. *Ibid.* no. 23: 121-122.

¹⁰ Garraty, Carnes, and American Council of Learned Societies., *American National Biography*, no. 4: 36.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, no. 22: 728.

¹² Countryman, *The American Revolution*, 112-13.

embraced politics out of doors as a tool of mobilization: petitions and remonstrances; pamphlets, satires, and newspapers; secret negotiations and committee meetings; and parades, processions, and other forms of crowd action.”¹³

Those women who resided in Philadelphia, then, experienced the years prior to and during the American Revolution in a very personal way. Sarah Franklin Bache, born on September 11, 1743, lived in Philadelphia until her death in 1808—although she traveled frequently throughout the northern colonies as an adult.¹⁴ Anne Home Shippen Livingstone, known by her friends and family as Nancy Shippen, also resided in Philadelphia; historian Ethel Armes notes that Shippen was considered by many to be “a belle and beauty of Philadelphia during the closing years of the American Revolution.”¹⁵ Though born in London, England, Esther DeBertd Reed likewise moved to Philadelphia in her early twenties following her marriage to lawyer Joseph Reed in 1770. Her husband, who served as military secretary to George Washington, was absent for much of the campaign; during the occupation of Philadelphia in the late 1770s, Reed and her family temporarily relocated to Norriton, Pennsylvania.¹⁶ The final Pennsylvania inhabitant, Sally Wister, lived with her family in Philadelphia until, in 1777, “the Wister family fled war-torn Philadelphia and took refuge with relatives in rural Gwynedd, Pennsylvania, until July 1778.”¹⁷

¹³ Carp, *Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution*, 212.

¹⁴ Garraty, Carnes, and American Council of Learned Societies., *American National Biography*, no. 1: 826-27.

¹⁵ Anne Home Shippen Livingstone and Ethel Armes, *Nancy Shippen, Her Journal Book; the International Romance of a Young Lady of Fashion of Colonial Philadelphia with Letters to Her and About Her* (New York: B. Blom, 1968), 15.

¹⁶ Garraty, Carnes, and American Council of Learned Societies., *American National Biography*, no. 18: 263-64.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 23: 13.

The final four women of this study came from the colonies of New York, New Hampshire and New Jersey, all of which were flourishing locations for the Sons of Liberty during the Revolutionary Era. In fact, the Sons of Liberty in New York City proved to be far more radical than their Boston counterparts, encouraging and even participating in acts of destruction in the 1760s.¹⁸ New Jersey, too, proved quite swift to respond publicly against the Stamp Act in 1765.¹⁹ Sarah Livingston Jay, New York resident, found that her marriage to statesman John Jay on April 28, 1774, necessitated her travel all over Europe, where she gave birth to four of her five surviving children; however, Jay always returned home to New York.²⁰ Abigail Abbot Bailey, born on February 2, 1746, spent most of her life in the town of Concord, New Hampshire.²¹ Jemima Condict, born in August, 1754, lived in Pleasandale, New Jersey, while Margaret Hill Morris, widowed at a young age, lived until her death in 1816 in Burlington, New Jersey, a town near the border of Philadelphia.²²

Another important quality held in common by each of these women was that of patriotism. Each of these fifteen women expressed, in varying degrees, a kind of patriotic sentiment. Typically they shared patriot ideals with their husbands and families, and sought to instill the virtues of patriotism to their children, as was the case with Sarah Livingston Jay and Abigail Adams. However, other women in this study came from families with mixed loyalties; Sarah Franklin Bache, for instance, though a staunch

¹⁸ Countryman, *The American Revolution*, 96.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

²⁰ John Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2004), 11.

²¹ Abigail Abbot Bailey and Ethan Smith, *Memoirs of Mrs. Abigail Bailey, Signal Lives* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), vii.

²² E. F. Ellet, Carrie Chapman Catt, and National American Woman Suffrage Association Collection (Library of Congress), *The Women of the American Revolution*, 2 vols. (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1848), No. 2: 281.

patriot like her father, articulated conflicted emotions toward her loyalist half-brother, William Franklin.²³

While many of these women dealt in some way or another with patriot ideology in their letters and journals, a select few chose to participate actively in the events preceding and during the Revolutionary War. Esther DeBerdt Reed, for instance, played an important role in forming the Association of Ladies, a cause devoted to providing aid to the Continental Army.²⁴ A prominent poet and playwright in the eighteenth century, Mercy Otis Warren likewise participated in revolutionary politics through her publication of several political plays and poems.²⁵ Phillis Wheatley also authored several notable poems on topics relating to revolution. Wheatley's poetry, both eloquently worded and politically charged, focused on issues ranging from the repeal of the stamp act to a shameless berating of British tyranny in America.²⁶

Religion also played an important role in female daily life. Nancy Cott persuasively argues in *The Bonds of Womanhood* that over time the church grew to become a haven of female community, a place where women could publicly assert themselves within the context of Protestantism.²⁷ Therefore, it comes as no surprise that religion would take a central position in the writings of many of these women. Several belonged to or were descended from members of the Congregational church: among these

²³ Garraty, Carnes, and American Council of Learned Societies., *American National Biography*, 826-27.

²⁴ Reed, along with assistance of Sarah Franklin Bache and thirty seven other women, raised over \$300,000 which, in turn, was used to supply shirts for the soldiers. *Ibid.*, No. 18: 263-64.

²⁵ Arguably the most important female propagandist of the pre-revolutionary era, Warren was a brilliant satirical writer, well-versed in politics and eighteenth-century literature. Melissa Bohrer has noted of Warren, "Mercy Otis Warren had accomplished what few others before her had: the complete unraveling of a reputation through the written word." Melissa Lukeman Bohrer, *Glory, Passion, and Principle : The Story of Eight Remarkable Women at the Core of the American Revolution* (New York: Atria Books, 2003), 109.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁷ Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" In New England, 1780-1835*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 206.

were Abigail Adams, a practicing member; Esther Edwards Burr, daughter of well-known minister Jonathan Edwards; and Hannah Adams, who authored several works of religious history, including 1791's *A View of Religions*.²⁸ Abigail Abbot Bailey, a strict Congregationalist, gained acceptance into the church on September 4, 1763 and fretted repeatedly over her declension.²⁹ Judith Sargent Murray, who converted from Congregationalism to Universalism in the 1780s, helped to establish the Universalist church in Boston.³⁰ Esther De Berdt Reed, a woman of Calvinist upbringing, descended from Huguenot refugees.³¹ Others were members of the Quaker faith, including Margaret Hill Morris, Sally Wister, and Sarah Franklin Bache.³²

Literacy is a necessary characteristic in this study.³³ All fifteen women included in this thesis shared a love for learning and a passion for reading and writing; however, distinct differences in the type of education each woman received are apparent. Those from the upper tiers of northern society—like Judith Sargent Murray, who was allowed to share in her brother's tutor as he prepared for Harvard College—had access to vast libraries and expensive tutors.³⁴ Also of a wealthy background, Sally Wister attended the

²⁸ Garraty, Carnes, and American Council of Learned Societies., *American National Biography*, no. 1: 87-88.

²⁹ Bailey and Smith, *Memoirs of Mrs. Abigail Bailey*, vii-x.

³⁰ Garraty, Carnes, and American Council of Learned Societies., *American National Biography*, no. 16: 161-62.

³¹ *Ibid.*, no. 18: 264.

³² Ellet, Catt, and National American Woman Suffrage Association Collection (Library of Congress), *The Women of the American Revolution*, 347.

³³ Historians Heidi Brayman Hackel and Catherine E. Kelly argue that, by 1800, female literacy in Britain and the United States had reached fifty percent: and, that by the middle of the nineteenth century, census reports noted female literacy to be as high as ninety percent. For more information, see Heidi Brayman Hackel and Catherine E. Kelly, *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 2. However, others have argued that literacy rates were far higher than fifty percent in the late-eighteenth century. Joel Perlmann, Silvana R. Siddali and Keith Whitescarver argue in "Literacy, Schooling, and Teaching among New England Women, 1730-1820" that have been as high as four-fifths to five-sixths of the younger female adult population of the region.

³⁴ Garraty, Carnes, and American Council of Learned Societies., *American National Biography*, no. 16: 162.

Quaker Girls School, where she “followed a progressive curriculum that fostered her lifelong love of writing.”³⁵ Mercy Otis Warren, too, participated in many of the history and literary lessons taught to James Otis, her brother.³⁶ Other families, however, approached the education of their daughters in a more utilitarian manner. Sarah Franklin Bache, for instance, was taught reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, and bookkeeping, all subjects aimed at making her “a capable housewife with enough business training to be useful to her future husband.”³⁷ Both Abigail Adams and Sarah Livingston Jay were educated at home by family members; Adams participated in studies ranging from “Shakespeare to Locke, from Plato to French.”³⁸ Hannah Adams, though from a less affluent family, received a thorough education from her father; Phillis Wheatley was taught to read and write as a child by her master, Susanna Wheatley.³⁹

The primary sources implemented within this study are comprised of published letters, journals, and memoirs authored by women living in the North. It would be incorrect to label these fifteen female writers as a representative sample of the region, however, as the very nature of their literacy places them in the minority of the female population during the period.⁴⁰ A disproportionate number of diarists during the eighteenth century were in their youth; yet, other factors—religion, marital hardship, and even the war itself—motivated the women of this study to put their daily activities and

³⁵ Ibid., no. 23: .

³⁶ Ibid., no. 22: 728.

³⁷ Ibid., no. 1: 826.

³⁸ Ibid., no. 1: 64.

³⁹ Ibid., no. 23: 121.

⁴⁰ Historians have noted that female literacy in England and America prior to 1800 comprised less than half of the population; by 1800, the number of literate women was at almost exactly fifty percent. Heidi Brayman Hackel and Catherine E. Kelly, *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800, Material Texts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 2.

perceptions into writing.⁴¹ In reading these female writings, I took great care to approach them without preconception, making note not only of the reappearing themes and significant events they deemed important enough to write about, but also of those things these women chose to omit. Eighteenth-century conventions regarding spelling and designations of the possessive were lenient and far from universal. This being said, I have chosen to correct female writings only sparingly in order to preserve fully the personal voices and tone of the women.

⁴¹ Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" In New England, 1780-1835*, 14-15.

CHAPTER 2

“THE MARRIED WOMAN CARETH FOR THE THINGS OF THE WORLD”: FEMALE RITUALS OF MARRIAGE AND MOTHERHOOD

For women living in the North in the years between 1763 and 1800, daily life often centered upon domestic routines and gendered expectations to succeed as wives and mothers. A close analysis of the letters, journals, and memoirs of the fifteen women used in this study illuminate five important themes pertinent to daily female life in the late eighteenth century: marriage, the family, domestic tasks, illness, and death. The shared experiences of middle-to-upper class women in relation to these ritualized patterns of female behavior make the individual vignettes that comprise this study all the more interesting. Demonstrating the ways in which the domestic world served as the focal point around which normative female behavior was organized, this chapter first assesses the similar and divergent ways these fifteen women understood their marriages and position within the family structure.

Certainly, while women of the period exercised a measure of control in their decision to marry—examination of female writings of the period indicates that a desire to marry for love rather than economic considerations began to emerge progressively throughout the eighteenth century—marriage, in many ways, continued to serve as a means by which to situate women within socially accepted structures of female behavior. Discussion of motherhood in female journals, letters, and memoirs indicates that women overwhelmingly adhered to expected patterns of childbirth and parenting, giving birth for the first time at a comparable age, becoming pregnant at similar intervals, and, on average, birthing approximately the same number of children. However, even though

marriage and motherhood maybe have served in some instances to subvert personal female agency, both allowed for women to form intimate ties with each other through their common experiences.

Courtship and Marriage

Marriage in the eighteenth century was, unquestionably, a central part of female domestic life; women's letters, journals, and memoirs provide one with an intimate glimpse into the day-to-day activities of married women. The relative natures of these women's marital unions are widely divergent, and will be discussed and analyzed in the following pages. However, regardless of the reasoning behind a woman's decision to wed or the nature of one's marital union, there is no denying that an overwhelming percentage of women residing in the northern colonies in the eighteenth century were married.

Of the fifteen women identified in this study, thirteen were married. On average, they tended to wed in their late teens or early twenties. At the younger end of the spectrum, Sarah Livingston Jay married her husband at the age of seventeen, and Judith Sargent Murray was eighteen when she married her first husband, John Stevens. Those who wed in their early twenties—including Abigail Abbot Bailey, Esther Burr, Sarah Hodgkins, Esther Reed, and Margaret Hill Morris—did so between the ages of twenty and twenty-three. However, four women waited until their mid twenties to wed; Phillis Wheatley and Jemima Condict were both twenty-five on the date of their nuptials, and Sarah Franklin Bache and Mercy Otis Warren were both twenty-six. Out of these fifteen women, only two—Hannah Adams and Sally Wister—elected not to marry at all.

Using popular contemporary literature as the primary source material to explicate the centrality of marriage in the eighteenth century, Jan Lewis provides valuable insight into the female role as wife in the new republic. Drawing upon Linda Kerber's ideology of the "Republican Mother," Lewis illustrates the importance of the "Republican Wife" as a central part of the woman's sphere, denoting the ways in which the rhetoric of the Revolution and the rise of republican ideals within conceptualizations of marriage allowed for several important changes to occur within the institution, including a decline in parental control over marriage.⁴² Lewis discusses the ways in which marriage was thought to be an exemplification of republican society as a whole, arguing that "Revolutionary-era writers held up the loving partnership of a man and wife in opposition to patriarchal dominion as the republican model for social and political relationships."⁴³

Marriage was an important transition in a woman's life, marking the female transformation from child to adult. Typically following a leisurely pattern in which up to six weeks could stretch between a woman's marriage and "going to housekeeping," the time when husband and wife moved in together in their own home, patterns of marriage in the eighteenth century denoted a lessening of economic calculation in determining one's spouse in favor of other considerations; rising romantic expectations amongst women of the period created a popular female understanding that one could, contrary to the ideals of their parents' generation, marry for companionship, friendship, or love.

⁴² Jan Lewis, "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic," *William and Mary Quarterly* 44 (Oct 1987): 694. Ruth H. Bloch further details the decreasing restrictions placed upon the institution of marriage in the eighteenth century, likewise citing a general decline of parental consent. While, in the seventeenth century, couples were directly punished for not obtaining the consent of their parents to wed, those of the eighteenth century were typically not; although the ministers who elected to marry them faced the penalty of a fine. *Gender and Morality in Anglo-American Culture, 1650-1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 89.

⁴³ *Ibid.*: 689.

However, as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich posits, romantic love in the Revolutionary Era still held a secondary position to economic concerns.⁴⁴

Following marriage, a woman's necessary dependence shifted from her father to her new husband, perpetuating protracted standards of economic stability as a central determinant of marriage despite rising romantic ideals of love and partnership.

Nevertheless, as becomes evident through the writings of these women, the nature of one's dependence upon her husband was markedly different from her previous reliance on her parents.⁴⁵ Bailey best explicated this sense of transition, writing, "As, while I lived with my parents, I esteemed it my happiness to be in subjection to them; so now I thought it might be a still greater benefit to be under the aid of a judicious companion, who would rule well his own house."⁴⁶ Bailey's journal entry denotes several interesting things about marital ideology during this period. Certainly, financial considerations served as a fundamental characteristic by which one's future husband ought to be chosen and, as Bailey indicated, a husband was unequivocally expected to assume the role of economic provider and head of the household. Yet, it is of particular interest to note that Bailey situated female economic dependence in a negative light only when referring to living in her parental home. Prior to marriage, a young woman's financial needs and desires were second to those of her parents; however, once married, it seems expected

⁴⁴ Laurel Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 138-42. For a more in-depth analysis of the role played by romantic love in marriage, see Daniel Scott Smith, "Parental Power and Marriage Patterns: An Analysis of Historical Trends in Hingham, Massachusetts," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 35 (1973). The shift within nineteenth-century marriage contracts from an agreement between father and son-in-law to a personal one between those betrothed is discussed in Michael Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth: Law and Family in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 35-38.

⁴⁵ Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*, 1st ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), 40.

⁴⁶ Abigail Abbot Bailey and Ethan Smith, *Memoirs of Mrs. Abigail Bailey, Signal Lives* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 11.

that a wife would be, simultaneously, treated thoughtfully by her husband and economically provided for. Therefore, even though women entered into a state of financial dependence upon marriage, their expectations of love and equal treatment demonstrate that marital circumstances were slowly improving.

It should come as no surprise, then, that marriage was not a decision to be taken lightly. Historian Nancy Cott has argued that for women marriage was the first step toward a lifelong domestic vocation. It was absolutely imperative for a woman to choose the correct husband, particularly as “marriage bound both man and woman and subjected her to him.”⁴⁷ Women, as Cott effectively argues, faced conflicting ideals in that they sought to marry for love; yet, through marriage, they committed themselves entirely to a man and, within the confines of the system of coverture, forsook their individual identities. Cott posits that conflicting ideals of romance and economic practicality appear to have “resulted in an economic reaction or ‘marriage trauma’ in the minds of some by the 1820s or 1830s.”⁴⁸ Several of the women addressed in this study developed unrealistically high expectations of their future marriages, as witnessed by Abigail Abbot Bailey’s journal entry in 1767, in which she expressed a wish that she and her future husband “might live together in peace and friendship; seeking each other’s true happiness till death.”⁴⁹ Hannah Adams displayed a similar outlook, writing in her journal, “True love is of so delicate a nature, that it can never be satisfied with anything short of love in return; and it is of a power so penetrating, that, by its own light, it sees into the heart of

⁴⁷ Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" In New England, 1780-1835*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 77.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁴⁹ Bailey and Smith, *Memoirs of Mrs. Abigail Bailey*, 11.

the person beloved.”⁵⁰ Those who recognized their inflated understanding of marriage viewed the prospect of long term love as nearly unattainable. Esther Reed, for example, noted, “That happens so seldom that it really would make me enter such a state with fear and trembling.”⁵¹ Denoting the sense in which true, enduring love was seemingly difficult—or even impossible—for a woman to obtain, Reed’s journal entry is indicative of the growing female trend in the eighteenth century: the elevation of the prospect of marrying for romantic love to a level by which it was only rarely obtained, leaving women to settle for the first husband that came along, to remain in an unhappy marriage, or to choose never to marry at all.

For Jemima Condict, too, marriage was not something to be entered into lightly. Condict, who waited until the age of twenty-five to marry Aaron Harrison, proved quite reluctant to accept the proposals of her previous suitors. As she stated in her journal, Condict thought herself “In no hurry for a husband at Present.”⁵² Detailing her relationship with Mr. Chandler, a suitor, Condict described the situation in which she turned down his earnest proposal, writing, “Because says I you will find that I am a crose ill contrived Pese of Stuf.”⁵³ Repeatedly demonstrating a very low sense of self-confidence characteristic of numerous other women in this study, Condict noted, following a conversation with another suitor, her amazement that he would “want to have a creature such as I.”⁵⁴ Even when faced with the proposition of an appropriate suitor, female emotions of modesty and inadequacy led some to doubt their self-worth; for

⁵⁰ Hannah Adams and Hannah Farnham Sawyer Lee, *A Memoir of Miss Hannah Adams* (Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1832), 67.

⁵¹ William B. Reed and Esther Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed, Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution. Series Iii* (New York: The New York Times, 1971), 49.

⁵² Jemima Condict et al., *Jemima Condict, Her Book: Being a Transcript of the Diary of an Essex County Maid During the Revolutionary War* (Newark, N.J.: The Carteret Book Club, 1930), 40.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

Conduct, this meant delaying her marriage until she felt truly confident in her choice of a partner.

One's decision to remain unmarried, then, becomes far clearer within this context. According to Joan Gundersen in *To Be Useful to the World*, changes within the system of marriage proved to be highly indicative of the shifting social environment during the Revolution. Speaking of the differences between the *feme sole*, a single woman, and the *feme covert*, a married one, Gundersen writes, "The generation that came of age after 1760 had a visible group of never-married women. The process of winning independence helped make married women's dependent status more noticeable and, for some, less desirable."⁵⁵ Emerging patriot ideals of freedom, equality, and community during and after the Revolution fundamentally conflicted with the notions of coverture so visible in the eighteenth century; women, therefore, experienced great difficulty reconciling the ideals of the American revolt against tyranny with their own marginalization and repression. It is important to note, however, that the decision to remain a spinster, for many, was considered less than desirable. As Norton has noted, "Single women usually resided as perpetual dependents in the homes of relatives, helping out with housework, nursing, and childcare in exchange for room and board."⁵⁶ While women of this period were beginning to question their secondary status within the family hierarchy, the decision to remain unmarried had not yet become commonplace or socially acceptable; historian Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller argues that, while eighteenth-century understanding of unwed women had improved from earlier preconceptions, "To be

⁵⁵ Joan R. Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World: Women in Revolutionary America, 1740-1790*, Rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 46.

⁵⁶ Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*, 41-42.

unmarried was disgraceful, a reproach rather than a sin.”⁵⁷ For many women, who valued their social reputation, it was better to risk an unhappy marriage than to remain single, and alone, forever.

Despite the potential shortcomings of remaining single, two women of this study did, in fact, choose not to marry. Hannah Adams serves as an excellent exemplification of the *feme sole*, writing on numerous occasions in her memoir of her disinterest in choosing a husband. “It has been readily allowed,” she wrote, “that marriage, without great congeniality, must render a person of sensibility extremely wretched.”⁵⁸ Rather than marry, Adams elected to pursue a writing career. Known for her insatiable passion for knowledge, she published several profitable books in the latter part of the eighteenth century, including *An Alphabetical Compendium of the Various Sects* and *A View of Religions*.⁵⁹ Being single enabled her to practice a career that the domestic lifestyle inherent within marriage would have, without question, prohibited. Poor and living alone, the loss of her sister while in her early twenties led Adams to remark on her loneliness. Despite this moment of sadness, however, there exists within Adams’ memoir an overarching sense that her social seclusion was entirely intentional; in fact, she wrote, “The solitude in which I lived was, however, to me, preferable to society in general.”⁶⁰ One can infer that Adams’ sense of independence, further developed by the death of her mother at the age of ten, led her to openly resist selecting a mate in favor of isolation and her own personal edification.

⁵⁷ Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, a Better Husband: Single Women in America: The Generations of 1780-1840* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 11.

⁵⁸ Adams and Lee, *A Memoir of Miss Hannah Adams*, 65.

⁵⁹ John A. Garraty, Mark C. Carnes, and American Council of Learned Societies., *American National Biography*, 24 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), no. 1: 87.

⁶⁰ Adams and Lee, *A Memoir of Miss Hannah Adams*, 6.

In the case of Sally Wister, the motives for remaining unmarried are less clear. It is immediately apparent that Wister lacked a well-cultivated sense of confidence in herself; she noted in her journal, “appear ah that indeed, why Sally has not charms sufficient to peirce the heart of a Soldier, but [still] I won’t dispair who knows what mischief I yet may do.”⁶¹ Wister, like many other women of this study, prominently displayed a sense apprehension and insecurity at the prospect of marriage. By her understanding, any man worth forming a bond with—in this case, a soldier—could and would never reciprocate her feelings; interestingly, however, Wister was not without the opportunity to marry. Indeed, her journal recounts tales of several interested men. Speaking at length of one in particular, Mr. Watts, in whom seems to have been interested, Wister wrote of his proposal over tea. While she stated that “had we been acquainted seven years we cou’d not have been more sociable,” Wister found herself unable to accept her suitor’s financial instability. In this instance, then, Wister’s economic considerations took precedence over any and all emotional attachments she felt toward Mr. Watts. Wister’s case, like others before her, is highly indicative of the slow transformation taking place within eighteenth-century matrimonial ideology; while many women did, in fact, consider romantic attachment an important element in choosing their future husband, desire for financial stability continued to remain an essential component.

Given the difficulty of the decision, the fact that an overwhelming majority of women during this period were married speaks volumes about the inseparability of marriage and female social norms in the eighteenth century. Analysis of female writings demonstrates that, while the ideals of the Revolutionary Era undoubtedly had begun to

⁶¹ Sarah Wister and Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola, *The Journal and Occasional Writings of Sarah Wister* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 1987), 47.

change patterns of marriage in the northern colonies, early eighteenth century connotations of gender roles continued to prescribe marriage as customary female behavior. Religion, too, served as an important factor in the decision to marry, as, within many prominent religions in the northern colonies, the union of a man and woman in marriage was sanctioned by the church as normative social behavior; Erik R. Seeman has noted that within the Puritan church the family as an organizational unit was “the source of societal stability and the center of daily religious experience.”⁶² Those who belonged to religious organizations in the North understood marriage as an expected initiation into adulthood; marriage was, in essence, an institution decreed by the Bible and the church and inexorably interwoven with religious principals.⁶³ Esther Reed wrote of her marriage as being ordained by God, noting, “Providence will surely smile on us, and give us the opportunity of joining our hands, since it has united our hearts.”⁶⁴ For many women of the Revolutionary Era, then, conceptualizations of marriage and religion were inextricably linked: and, because Christian ideology firmly positioned the husband as the head of the familial household, this connection between marriage and religious doctrine served to further reinforce patriarchal authority.⁶⁵

Desire for long-term companionship, too, serves as a pivotal reason behind a woman’s decision to wed. Esther Edwards Burr wrote in her journal of the need for company, “Pray what do you think every body marrys in, or about Winter for? Tis quite merry, is’nt it? I realy belive tis for fear of laying cold, and for the want of a

⁶² Merrill D. Smith, *Sex and Sexuality in Early America* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 125.

⁶³ Cott expands upon this ideology in Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 11. She argues, “The legal oneness of husband and wife derived from common law but it matched the Christian doctrine that ‘the twain shall be one flesh’”; in this sense, marriage ideology was deeply connected to ideals of Christianity.

⁶⁴ Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 132.

⁶⁵ Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*, 11.F

bedfellow.”⁶⁶ Reed echoed the sentiment, speaking of the example set by her parents, “That’s the happiness I think the greatest, that after twenty years living together, to find the same complaisance, the same warmth of affection as the first.”⁶⁷ Indicating the slow shift away from parental control and economic calculation in the courtship process, female writing during the Revolutionary Era indicated a widespread desire to marry a friend and companion rather than simply just an economic provider.

Love and sexuality also played a role in influencing a woman’s decision to take a husband. Despite elevated perceptions of the romantic side of marriage, it is clear that many women did find in their courtship a mate with whom they shared a truly affectionate bond; and, once found, they were reluctant to put off the wedding for even a short duration. Burr wrote of an example in her journal, stating, “To my surprize had an invitation to Mr Ogdens in the Eve to see Miss Abbey married, for when I was there but the day before I did not mistrust she was to be yoked in two or three weeks—but they are to be pardoned. I suppose they did not know how to wait any longer.”⁶⁸ For this couple, intertwined feelings of affection and sexual desire—being unable to wait any longer for their wedding day—made waiting three weeks to wed unbearable. Murray likewise discussed a wedding in which bride and groom seemed exceedingly happy with each other; she notes of her friend Colonel Coates, “His eldest daughter, however, a beautiful Woman, being happily united to the Man of her heart.”⁶⁹ Here, too, emotions rather than economics served as the underlying basis of the marital union; in fact, the anecdotes of

⁶⁶ Esther Edwards Burr, Carol F. Karlsen, and Laurie Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 79.

⁶⁷ Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 49.

⁶⁸ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 79.

⁶⁹ Judith Sargent Murray, Bonnie Hurd Smith, and Judith Sargent Murray Society., *From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th-Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Judith Sargent Murray Society and Curious Traveller Press, 1998), 192.

both Burr and Murray demonstrate, unquestionably, that women in the Revolutionary period, more and more, were choosing to marry for love.

It is particularly fascinating to witness accounts of individual female agency in determining one's husband within many of these women's experiences. In several instances, the women of this study revealed a stubborn insistence upon a mate considered by others to be an inadequate marital match. Going against her father's will, for example, Reed wrote several secret love letters to her future husband, noting that "Now I think I am doing what is contrary to my father's will, and was he to know it, he would never forgive me."⁷⁰ Sarah Franklin Bache, too, chose to marry Richard Bache, despite the misgivings of her father.⁷¹ It becomes increasingly apparent that women of the late eighteenth century expected to marry the man of their own—rather than their parents'—choosing and, in nearly all cases, they were unwilling to defer to the will of others on the matter. However, despite these demonstrations of female will in asserting their choice of a husband, not all women within this study were so fortunate as to marry their true love. Anne Home Shippen Livingston, engaged in a long courtship with suitor Louis Otto, was instead pressured into an unhappy marriage with Henry Livingston by her parents. Yet, as her journal readily indicates, Shippen's love for Otto never abated.⁷² Even in this case, Shippen demonstrated the mounting expectation among women that one ought to be allowed to marry for true love; in fact, shortly prior to her forced marriage to Livingston,

⁷⁰ Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 29.

⁷¹ Garraty, Carnes, and American Council of Learned Societies., *American National Biography*, no. 1: 826-27.

⁷² Two years following her marriage to Henry Livingston, Shippen wrote of an instance in which Otto complemented her on her beauty. "Shall I confess that I felt pleas'd to be approved of by him? Why? Because he is my sincere friend--& was once (O! happy time!) my lover," she lamented. Anne Home Shippen Livingston and Ethel Armes, *Nancy Shippen, Her Journal Book; the International Romance of a Young Lady of Fashion of Colonial Philadelphia with Letters to Her and About Her* (New York: B. Blom, 1968), 129 & 43.

Shippen accepted Otto's proposal of marriage without a second thought as to her parents' opinion on the subject. Equally telling is Shippen's open and candid disapproval of her forced marriage, clearly denoting that, in her case, romantic ties were infinitely more important than financial ones.

For the majority of women in this study, though, the process of courtship brought with it a sense of excitement at the possibility of a happy and fulfilling union. Reed wrote to her betrothed in the months leading up to her wedding day of the "pleasure and satisfaction" she felt at the prospect of their marriage, noting, "my heart is so full of anxiety, that it must vent itself somewhere, and to whom can I do it better than into a bosom that entertains so honorable a love?"⁷³ For Reed, her decision to marry, though not made nonchalantly, proves to be well-based in a realistic and loving relationship.⁷⁴

An assessment of these women's journals, letters, and other writing also offers insight into male and female roles as they applied to marriage in the eighteenth century. Lewis's comparison between the qualities of a good husband and good citizen in *The Republican Wife* is quite enlightening; a respectable man, Lewis notes, was to live his life with honor, always deferring to the communal, rather than the private, good. In fact, "the ideal husband resembled more than a little the popular portrait of the Revolutionary War officer," she writes.⁷⁵ Similarly, the virtue of a good republican citizen was seen as equally applicable to wives; it was the female role, then, to maintain good, virtuous manners in her husband. In a strain very similar to the Cult of Domesticity prevalent within the nineteenth century, Lewis argues that "Once she had seduced him to virtue, the

⁷³ Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 33.

⁷⁴ Not long prior to their wedding date, Reed wrote in a letter to her soon-to-be husband of their mutual affection, adding, "To hear of your happiness will always give me pleasure, but more, if I ever have it in my power to share it." *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷⁵ Lewis, "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic," 696.

married woman's task was to preserve her husband in an exalted state to which her influence had raised him."⁷⁶ Women, always moral, were to instill and maintain in their husbands proper family values through their behavior within the home.

Laurel Thatcher offers an excellent assessment of the female role of wife as it applied to Puritan society in New England; while Puritans lived in an unquestionably male-oriented world, female roles had far more flexibility than some might imagine. Ulrich meticulously demonstrates this through her analysis of a series of important female functions in New England society, including housewife, deputy husband, mistress, and consort; through this assessment, Ulrich reveals the numerous ways in which women transcended gender and enriched their lives through their prescribed roles.⁷⁷

There is a distinct understanding within women's writing as to the gender roles within marriage, even if it is not explicitly discussed. For instance, Burr's effeminate description of her betrothed cousin denotes a sense of expected male behavior; she wrote, "Cousen Billy Vance is going to be Married—did you ever hear the like? Pray what can he do with a Wife? –he is more of a Woman than of a Man."⁷⁸ Female writings in the latter portion of the eighteenth century exhibit a very distinct conceptualization of masculinity and the male role as it related to marriage. Perhaps most importantly, the husband was expected to provide economically for both his wife and family; this is seen not only in Wister's rejection of a suitor's proposal because of his financial instability, but in Murray's analysis of an unnamed clergyman who was forced to support his wife and nine children on a stipend of forty pounds a year. Murray wrote, "His circumstance

⁷⁶ Ibid.: 701.

⁷⁷ Laurel Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 9-10.

⁷⁸ Burr, Karlson, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 105.

had such a melancholy effect upon his feelings, as to destroy his health, and procure a temporary derangement.” For this man, the inability to provide for his family undermined his role as husband.⁷⁹ Husbands also appeared within women’s letters and journals as a valuable source of knowledge to their wives; Reed wrote of her husband’s role of educator, “I often find the want of your advice and instruction, but I hope to enjoy these pleasures again.”⁸⁰

Some gender roles relating to marriage, however, appear more fluid. On the surface, female writings indicate that a woman should defer to her husband in the decision making process: Murray, writing of her desire to travel home to Gloucester in a letter to a male cousin, noted, “Yet, after all, decision rests not with me – My wishes ought to be formed by the inclinations of Mr Murray – as a Wife, it doth not become me to direct.”⁸¹ Murray’s letter, notably written to a man, indicates a superficial expectation that one will leave the household management to the husband. Of course, examples abound of women who did, in fact, take control of the decision making process. In several instances, women in this study made decisions to travel, to entertain guests, or even to inoculate their children, without the input of their husbands. Burr described an extreme illustration of such behavior in her discussion of a Mr. Spencer, who chose not to make a trip to Boston entirely at the demand of his wife. Burr writes, “Mr Spencer is under peticoat govournment that is certain.”⁸² The fact that Burr discussed the conduct of Mrs. Spencer so matter-of-factly—and even had a special term designated for such

⁷⁹ Murray, Smith, and Judith Sargent Murray Society., *From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th-Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray*, 192.

⁸⁰ Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 111.

⁸¹ Murray, Smith, and Judith Sargent Murray Society., *From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th-Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray*, 171.

⁸² Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 114.

behavior—indicates that female control of a marriage, while not prevalent to say the least, proved to be not that uncommon in the Revolutionary Era.

A woman's role within the compact of marriage was deemed equally important to that of her husband's; she was to be of "superior character," pious, and good-natured, noted Murray in her journal.⁸³ As Burr so succinctly described it, "The married Woman careth for the things of the World."⁸⁴ While the husband served as the visible head of the household and family economy, it was the wife who carried out the details, all the while demonstrating her piety and morality. Ruth H. Bloch further explicates the female ideal as witnessed within these fifteen women's writings, noting that, while Puritan literature in the late eighteenth century did promote the intellectual inferiority and submissive behavior of women, many of the familial qualities upheld applied equally to both men and women: "Faith, virtue, wisdom, sobriety, industry, mutual love, and fidelity in marriage, and joint obligations to children were typically enjoined on both sexes."⁸⁵ In many instances, then, the gender roles ascribed to husband and wife served to work together in forming the eighteenth-century family unit; and while certain responsibilities were understood as distinctly male or female, many—including expectations of marital fidelity and childrearing practices—did, in fact, overlap.

It becomes quickly apparent that a woman was expected to provide more than just companionship to her husband, but rather, "by her cheerfulness, vivacity, and prompt attention affectionately lendeth him every needed aid."⁸⁶ One might assume that such

⁸³ Murray, Smith, and Judith Sargent Murray Society., *From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th-Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray*, 156.

⁸⁴ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 111.

⁸⁵ Ruth H. Bloch, *Gender and Morality in Anglo-American Culture, 1650-1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 59.

⁸⁶ Murray, Smith, and Judith Sargent Murray Society., *From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th-Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray*, 208.

high expectations of feminine behavior would discourage the women of this study; however, female writings reveal quite the opposite, illuminating a continuous and willing desire to live up to their husband's expectations of femininity. "Had I more fortune and accomplishments of mind or beauty," Reed wrote, "I should, with the highest joy, give them all to you, my dearest friend, and make them subservient to that which lies so near my heart."⁸⁷ Socially constructed expectations that a wife would eagerly offer to her husband both her love and hard work permeated female writing in the late eighteenth century; though possibly motivated by a sense of obligation, in Reed's case it is a close emotional connection with her lover that encouraged her to give willingly all that she had to her husband.

It is of particular use to assess the ways in which these women understood and chose to write about their own marriages. To begin with, much can be learned about the nature of a relationship by the manner in which a woman referred to her husband. Certainly, the common eighteenth-century practice of referring to one's husband by his surname in letters does not in and of itself denote an unhappy or particularly formal marriage; and, while these fourteen women did, in fact, address letters to their husbands in a formal manner, they referred to them in the bodies of their letters by far more endearing terms. For instance, Reed repeatedly referred to Joseph Reed as "my dear friend," while Sarah Hodgkins addressed Joseph Hodgkins as her "Loving Husband."⁸⁸ Abigail Adams called John Adams "my much loved friend," even closing a letter in September of 1767 with "To morrow I return home, where I hope soon to receive the Dearest of Friends and the tenderest of Husbands, with that unabated affection which has

⁸⁷ Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 134.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 309, Herbert T. Wade and Robert A. Lively, *This Glorious Cause; the Adventures of Two Company Officers in Washington's Army* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958), 170.

for years part, and wil whilst the vital spark lasts, burn in the Bosom of your affectionate.”⁸⁹ Glimpses into a woman’s most intimate moments of letter writing, then, indicate that those who found a partner with whom they shared love and respect felt more than willing to reciprocate their emotional attachment to their husband through terms of endearment and loving phrases.

In exploring the diaries and letters of these fourteen women, it becomes quickly apparent that, in most cases, their unions were happy and loving. Many women relished the time spent with their companions, particularly when the turmoil surrounding the American Revolution led to the relocation of many of their husbands across the eastern seaboard. When traveling with her husband, for instance, Murray spoke happily of the time she and her husband spent outdoors in the rural areas of Connecticut: “Mr Murray took my hand and we passed down the activity together.”⁹⁰ Enjoying nature was an activity she and Mr. Murray participated in often during their travels; “He pointed out the names[,] qualities and ability of the objects before me,” she added.⁹¹ Murray’s union demonstrates that, even when not entirely in control of the direction of their lives, women could—and did—still find happiness with their partners and lifestyles.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing aspects of female expressions of the state of their marriage is an obvious reluctance to trust fully in their contentment. In some cases, it appears that women found their happiness within their marriage too good to be true; Reed, for instance, wrote of her loving relationship as though it was atypical, denoting a sense within her journal that a marriage based upon romantic love proved the exception

⁸⁹ John Adams, Margaret A. Hogan, and C. James Taylor, *My Dearest Friend: Letters of Abigail and John Adams* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 26.

⁹⁰ Murray, Smith, and Judith Sargent Murray Society., *From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th-Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray*, 83.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

rather than the rule. “Everything my love for my dear Mr. Reed made me expect,” she wrote, “his tenderness fulfils. I sometimes draw an unfavorable omen from our happiness, that it must meet with some alloy.”⁹² While marriages based upon feelings of friendship and love were becoming increasingly more common in the Revolutionary era, Reed’s unexpected satisfaction with her marital union suggests that the transformation from economically based matches to those originating in romance had not yet completed within her lifetime. Murray, too, told an anecdote of her marital relationship that evinces her sense that her husband’s affectionate behavior was in some way undeserved. After spending several days alone, Murray wrote of hearing her husband come home early from his travels abroad, noting that she “expected to see him fatigued and debilitated.” However, contrary to her written expectations, the first action of her husband after he entered was not to lie down and rest; rather, he stepped into the bedroom and, “with one of the most benevolent smiles, and taking my hand—he pressed it with much affection to his lips.”⁹³ For Murray, too, it is obvious that the bond she shared with her husband was truly one of fondness; however, the fact that Murray still anticipated her partner to put his needs ahead of hers is equally telling of the gendered nature of expectations related to marriage in the eighteenth century.

Unfortunately, not all women of this study were so content within their marriage. Bailey, for instance, demonstrated a marked disaffection with her husband, Asa Bailey, from the very beginning of their marriage. While she hoped her husband would be “a companion of a meek, peaceable temper; a lover of truth; discreet and pleasant,” she wrote instead that the man she married was of a hard, uneven, rash temper; and was

⁹² Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 167.

⁹³ Murray, Smith, and Judith Sargent Murray Society., *From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th-Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray*, 126.

capable of being very unreasonable.”⁹⁴ Bailey, throughout the course of her marriage, suffered through one painful experience after another at the hands of her husband; upon learning of her husband’s frequent adultery, Bailey, a strict adherent to the Congregationalist church, compared his indiscretions to death, writing “I mourned the loss of my husband, not only on my own account, and on account of our tender offspring, but especially on account of his precious soul, which I viewed in the swift way to ruin.”⁹⁵ Yet, despite her husband’s numerous threats on her life and, a few years later, the blatant sexual abuse of their eldest daughter, Bailey continued to profess her love for him, writing in her journal, “But this I kept to myself. I labored to put these evils from my mind as much as possible.”⁹⁶

The process of divorce during the Revolutionary Era was a particularly difficult and painful one, especially if initiated by a woman. It took over twenty years of marriage for Bailey to decide finally to separate—and, eventually, attain legal divorce—from her abusive husband. Fearing for her life, she wrote, “I told Mr. B he *knew* he had violated his marriage covenant; and hence had forfeited all legal and just right and authority over me.”⁹⁷ Yet, this relationship speaks unequivocally about the negative social and religious connotations inherent within separation and divorce, and the difficulty a woman might face in seeking to attain her freedom. Bailey writes, “I well knew it was no small thing for a husband and wife to part, and their family of children to be broken up; that such a separation could not be rendered expedient or lawful, without great sin indeed.”⁹⁸ While Bailey’s example is certainly aberrant from the typical relationship of the Revolutionary

⁹⁴ Bailey and Smith, *Memoirs of Mrs. Abigail Bailey*, 12.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

Era, it still provides insight into the evolving position of love within the bond of marriage during the period.⁹⁹ Despite her husband's repeated infidelity, a clear violation of his nuptial obligations, Bailey remained reluctant to admit openly to her marital discontent.¹⁰⁰ In this case, it seems that Bailey's elevated expectations of affection within her marriage prevented her from recognizing the absence—or, in the very least, the complicated nature—of love within her marriage, alluding to the rapidly increasing anticipation among women in the latter portion of the eighteenth century that a marriage should be comprised of both stability and love.

Nancy Shippen Livingston serves as another example of an unhappy marriage; immediately following her forced marriage to Henry Livingston, Shippen learned of her husband's horrible temper inclination toward infidelity, which led to fathering children out of wedlock. Demonstrating a remarkable sense of personal will during a period when leaving one's husband was nearly unheard of, and without question, socially unacceptable, Shippen fled to her childhood home after less than two years of marriage.¹⁰¹ "Why did I believe him when he swore so often he loved me, & that he wou'd make me eternally happy," Shippen lamented.¹⁰² Disagreeing with the assessment

⁹⁹ *Over the Threshold: Intimate Violence in Early America* (New York: Routledge, 1999) provides a context, albeit specific, by which to assess the quantity of abusive marriages during the Revolutionary Era; Randolph A. Roth notes that, of 207 divorces in Windsor County, Vermont, in the years between 1793 and 1837, thirty-five percent of wives sued on the grounds of "intolerable severity," or physical abuse. 67.

¹⁰⁰ Historian Hendrik Hartog adds that, in the case of Bailey, her delay in deciding to leave her husband was not a result of victimization or passive behavior; rather, "For her, waiting was essential for her moral identity. She could not act until she knew and understood God's will." *Man and Wife in America: A History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 41.

¹⁰¹ For further clarification on the concept "eloped," or runaway, wives, see Clare A. Lyon's chapter entitled "A Springboard to Revolution: Runaway Wives and Self-Divorce," in which Lyons argues that, even prior to the American Revolution, women began to revolt against traditional models of patriarchy by rejecting their unhappy marriages. *Sex Among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1730-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 14-58.

¹⁰² Livingston and Armes, *Nancy Shippen, Her Journal Book; the International Romance of a Young Lady of Fashion of Colonial Philadelphia with Letters to Her and About Her*, 140.

of a friend that, in marriage, “Women are only born to suffer & to obey,” Shippen wrote, “Equality is the soul of friendship: marriage, to give delight, must join *two minds*, not devote a slave to the will of an imperious Lord.”¹⁰³ Shippen’s short-lived experience with marriage, too, has much to say about the slowly evolving female mindset in regards to marriage; while for a short term Shippen accepted her husband’s promise of marital love as a reason to remain with him, Livingston’s inability to live up to his word provided reason enough for her to leave. Shippen’s actions demonstrate that she, like many other women in the period, expected love and equality to both hold prominent positions within her marriage. Likewise, her case—and that of Bailey’s, as well—reveals that, for a husband, marital unfaithfulness was an unacceptable behavior: one that could easily warrant separation.

What, then, prompted Shippen to separate so quickly from her husband when Bailey could not? Certainly, social standing plays a significant role in this distinction; Livingston, a member of a distinguished family in Philadelphia, had a large family estate to which she might return. Bailey, on the other hand, did not; in fact, rather than run away from her husband, Bailey instead handed him his clothes and forced him, following a long and drawn out struggle, to leave their marital home.¹⁰⁴ It is likely that religion, too, had an effect on Bailey’s decision to remain with her husband. Bailey, a lifelong member of the Congregationalist church, repeatedly cast separation from her husband as sinful, despite his inexcusable behavior; Livingston, however, appeared unhindered by religious connotations in choosing to leave her husband.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 145.

¹⁰⁴ Bailey and Smith, *Memoirs of Mrs. Abigail Bailey*, 47.

Most importantly, however, these two prominent examples of late eighteenth-century divorce have much to say about the evolution of marital expectations during the period. For Bailey, who married in 1768, the notion of withdrawing herself from a loveless and non-monogamous union was beyond her comprehension; it was not until twenty-six years later, when conceptualizations of marriage based upon love, friendship, and equality were more commonplace, that Bailey finally made the appeal for divorce from Asa Bailey. Shippen, who married Livingston in 1781, demonstrates that marital ideology—and, concurrently, presuppositions of a husband’s proper conduct—greatly evolved in the North over the second half of the eighteenth century. In fact, between the years of 1755 and 1764, twelve women in Massachusetts sued for divorce; however, between 1775 and 1786, the number of women who applied for a divorce had more than tripled to fifty-three.¹⁰⁵ Within this context, Shippen’s decision to leave her husband becomes infinitely more clear; Shippen envisioned her marriage would be an affectionate one and, when she realized it was not, she chose to extricate herself from it. She herself addressed her reason for separating from Henry Livingston, writing, “Wretched Unhappy man—Nothing but your being jealous, & treating me ill in consequence of that jealousy, shou’d have tempted me to leave you.”¹⁰⁶

Divorce in the northern colonies during the Revolutionary Era, though by no means a prevalent practice, did become increasingly more commonplace throughout the period. Nancy Cott has effectively employed divorce records in early Massachusetts to explicate marriage and family life in New England, writing, “The history of divorce

¹⁰⁵ Nancy F. Cott, "Divorce and the Changing Status of Women in Eighteenth Century Massachusetts," *William and Mary Quarterly* 33 (Oct 1976): 592.

¹⁰⁶ Livingston and Armes, *Nancy Shippen, Her Journal Book; the International Romance of a Young Lady of Fashion of Colonial Philadelphia with Letters to Her and About Her*, 143.

practice documents sex-role expectations, permits comparison between the obligations and freedoms of husbands and wife, and provides a test of the double standard of sexual morality.”¹⁰⁷ Cott argues that, between the years 1692 and 1786, “More wives than husbands sued for divorce”; yet, wives tended to expect less success with their appeals than did husbands, largely because of illiteracy, female secondary status, and inaccessibility to the necessary funds with which to appeal.¹⁰⁸ Women sued for divorce on the grounds of numerous categories ranging from physical abuse, sexual incapacity, and adultery to desertion. Yet, as Linda Kerber argues in *Women of the Republic*, even though civil divorce was available in New England, such was not the case in all regions. American colonies did not possess a uniform standard by which to obtain divorce, leading to a “substantial degree of variation among the colonies’ laws.”¹⁰⁹

Overall, then, patterns of both marriage and divorce during the years surrounding the Revolutionary War denote several important things about female domestic life. Certainly, by the latter portion of the eighteenth century, women anticipated themselves to have at least a significant say in their choice of a husband; likewise, female writings exhibit a common and slowly-evolving understanding that, while financial stability remained an important factor in choosing a husband, one could also expect to marry for friendship and love; although, it is important to note, the shift in ideology from economically to romantically-based marriage was not fully complete by the start of the nineteenth century. Whereas, of course, not all of the women in this study were happy in their marriages, those who felt satisfied were more than willing to express their

¹⁰⁷ Cott, "Divorce and the Changing Status of Women in Eighteenth Century Massachusetts," 586.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*: 594.

¹⁰⁹ Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 160.

contentment through both letters and journal entries; and while analysis of prescribed male and female roles as they related to marriage in the eighteenth-century denote that women commonly chose to diminish their needs in favor of those of their husbands, gendered responsibilities within a marriage typically served to interact in the creation of a satisfying family unit. Finally, changes in divorce practices are equally indicative of shifting female expectations toward their relationships, demonstrating that many women during the period of the American Revolution grew more assertive and less willing to accept a loveless union or marital infidelity.

Motherhood

Marriage, of course, was only one portion of the eighteenth-century “female sphere.” A woman’s occupation within the home also extended to the next step of the female life cycle: child bearing and rearing. Motherhood permeated female domestic life, serving as the focal point around which the eighteenth-century family was built.

“Motherhood,” Nancy Cott has written, “was proposed as the central level with which women could budge the world and, in practice, it offered the best opportunity to women to heighten their domestic power.”¹¹⁰ Of the women included in this study, then, it comes as no surprise that nearly all were parents; twelve out of the fifteen women, in fact, were mothers. Of these twelve women, ten followed normative patterns of childbirth in the Revolutionary Era, giving birth to their first child within approximately two years of marriage.¹¹¹ Morris diverged slightly from the common example in that her first child, Richard, was born four years after she and her husband married. Murray, too, deviated

¹¹⁰ Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" In New England, 1780-1835*, 84.

¹¹¹ Richard W. Wertz and Dorothy C. Wertz write that, during the period, women on average married at age twenty-two and gave birth to their first child approximately sixteen months afterward. *Lying-In: A History of Childbirth in America* (New York: Free Press, 1977), 2.

from the other women of this study in that she was in a childless marriage with Mr. Stevens for nearly twenty years, although she and her husband did adopt two girls, Anna Plummer, John's niece, and Polly Odell, a distant cousin.¹¹² However, her second marriage in 1788 to Reverend Murray produced two children, the first born only a little over a year after the wedding.¹¹³ Hodgkins, it is interesting to note, assumed responsibility for her husband's daughter of a previous marriage, Joanna, in addition to Sarah, her own daughter.¹¹⁴ Yet, despite variations in patterns of motherhood, for the overwhelming majority of women during the Revolutionary Era, it was a shared—and socially expected—behavior through which they could a special set of female bonds.

The mothers of this study experienced both pregnancies and childbirth in a highly comparable manner. Ten gave birth to five or fewer live children; Bache, not far beyond the average, had seven children. Bailey, in this instance, is the anomaly; of her seventeen pregnancies, fifteen children survived. Likewise, in the case of ten out of twelve mothers, their children were birthed approximately one and a half to two years apart.¹¹⁵ Exceptions to the rule were Morris, who gave birth to her son Richard in 1762, then waited four years before having her second child, and Jay, who gave birth in accordance with typical patterns until her fifth child, William, born nearly six years after his sister

¹¹² The fact that Murray's first marriage was a childless one, while the second was not, serves as an interesting indication of potential infertility. Historians Margaret Marsh and Wanda Ronner provide fascinating insight into the subject of barrenness in the eighteenth century, noting that, while a married couple's inability to procreate was often personally disheartening, it "was not generally a societal concern; neither was infertility a subject of pressing interest to most physicians." *The Empty Cradle: Infertility in America from Colonial Times to the Present* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 10.

¹¹³ Garraty, Carnes, and American Council of Learned Societies., *American National Biography*, no. 16: 161-62.

¹¹⁴ Wade and Lively, *This Glorious Cause; the Adventures of Two Company Officers in Washington's Army*, 48-50.

¹¹⁵ The Wertzes argue that births were typically situated between fifteen and twenty months apart "because conception was biologically unlikely as long as a woman was still nursing an infant." *Lying-In*, 3.

Ann.¹¹⁶ Adhering to commonly-held practices of birth, the women of this study—and, in a broader sense, those of the region in general—produced children at regular intervals in conjunction with socially acceptable norms.¹¹⁷

For women in the Revolutionary Era, the process of childbirth evinced intertwined emotions of dread and excitement. Statistics relating to colonial fertility reveal that women in the eighteenth century, on average, gave birth to somewhere between five and seven live children; however, instances of miscarriage, stillbirth, and early infant death were extremely prevalent. Norton writes, “Most mature women experienced five to ten pregnancies and had between three and eight surviving children,” a statistic comparable to the women of this study, who, on average, were pregnant five times and gave birth to four live children.¹¹⁸ Murray wrote of a friend, who, although certainly an extreme case, lost almost all of her children following childbirth: “Mrs Woodrow hath been a daughter of affliction—yeah even in the severest sense of the word—Of thirteen Sons, and daughters, whom she hath borne, only two females now remain.”¹¹⁹ For nearly all women, infant death was an inescapable part of the female experience of motherhood.

¹¹⁶ Garraty, Carnes, and American Council of Learned Societies., *American National Biography*, no. 1: 64, 87, 826, no. 4: 36, 39-40, no. 13: 14-15, no. 16: 161, no. 18: 263-64, no. 22: 728, no. 23: 121.

¹¹⁷ For further information on eighteenth-century childbirthing practices and mortality rates, see Nancy Schrom Dye’s article “History of Childbirth in America” in *Signs* 6, no. 1 (Autumn 1980), 99-100. For further discussion of patterns of childbirth and midwifery, see Catherine M. Scholten’s “On the Importance of the Obstetrick Art’: Changing Customs of Childbirth in America, 1760 to 1825” in *The William and Mary Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (July 1977), 427-430.

¹¹⁸ Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*, 72.

¹¹⁹ Murray, Smith, and Judith Sargent Murray Society., *From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th-Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray*, 111.

Table 1
BIRTH STATISTICS PER HOUSEHOLD

	Number of Pregnancies	Number of Surviving Babies
A. Adams	6	5
H. Adams	0	0
Bache	8	7
Bailey	17	15
Burr	2	2
Condict	0	0
Hodgkins	2	1
Jay	6	5
Morris	4	4
Murray	2	1
Reed	6	5
Shippen	1	1
Warren	5	5
Wheatley	3	1
Wister	0	0

Of these twelve mothers, eight lost at least one infant during or soon after birth.¹²⁰ It comes as no surprise, then, that when writing to other women about a friend or acquaintance's pregnant condition, many described the impending birth in a negative or foreboding way. In a letter to her dear friend, Sarah Prince, Burr wrote of her neighbor's imminent birth, noting, "She continues low, is discouraged. She now looks every hour for her time of Travail"¹²¹ Likewise, women often demonstrated a sense of empathy when speaking of a friend's laying-in period; for instance, Burr writes, "Sister Dwight is nere her time of Laying. I feel distresst for her."¹²² Women expressed repeatedly, when discussing pregnancy or childbirth, an enormous sense of apprehension: and, while rates

¹²⁰ Garraty, Carnes, and American Council of Learned Societies., *American National Biography*, no. 1: 64, 87, 826, no. 4: 36, 39-40, no. 13: 14-15, no. 16: 161, no. 18: 263-64, no. 22: 728, no. 23: 121.

¹²¹ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 100.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 58.

of infant mortality and female death during childbirth had begun to decline by the close of the eighteenth century, one still discerns within female writings their dread of the unknown in terms of childbearing.¹²³

Despite the fear of the potentially deadly outcome of childbirth for both mother and baby, what historian Judith Walzer Leavitt has deemed as the “shadow of maternity,” female writings corroborate a sense that the positive aspects of pregnancy outweighed the negative.¹²⁴ Amidst the many other prevalent illnesses of the eighteenth century, the pain and sickness surrounding one’s pregnancy proved comparatively less disheartening. In a letter to her husband, Jay spoke of her cousin, “she is not well, but as the cause of her illness is a natural one, there is less reason to regret it.”¹²⁵ As evidenced by Jay’s statement, there were an endless number of diseases that could threaten one’s life during the period; but only one sickness, pregnancy, brought with it the opportunity for new life. Yet, regardless of any negative feelings toward childbirth, motherhood allowed women to unite, through their letter-writing network, in their experience of the process. Female friends proved more than willing to share in their letters and journals the joy they felt at holding their newborn child in their arms for the first time, and to offer others their best wishes when a close friend or family member embarked upon the path of motherhood; “At the moment of your reading this letter, your painful hour will, if I have calculated correctly, have passed over,” wrote Murray to her sister, “and you, I fondly

¹²³ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich states that Martha Ballard, a skilled midwife, listed complications in 5.6 percent of her births and saw approximately five maternal deaths for every 1,000 live births. By comparison, maternal deaths in rural English villages during the same period range between ten and twenty-nine per thousand births, and, in London and Dublin hospitals, between thirty and two hundred. Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*, 171-73.

¹²⁴ Judith Walzer Leavitt, *Brought to Bed: Childbearing in America, 1750 to 1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 14.

¹²⁵ John Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2004), 129.

hope will be amply compensated for every suffering.”¹²⁶ Women agreed: the pain of giving birth was more than compensated by the birth of a healthy child.

While these fifteen women mention on numerous occasions the situations surrounding the pregnancy and childbirth of a close friend or family member, it is most interesting to observe a genuine reluctance on their part to discuss their own pregnancies. Jay, for instance, made no mention of her pregnancy prior to the birth of her daughter Maria in 1782 to either of her sisters, although she does make note of it in a letter to her father, writing that, in the near future, she would “have the pleasure of giving you a little name-sake.”¹²⁷ Reed, in a letter to her husband, only described her own feelings of apprehension towards her impending childbirth; “The fears of my approaching hour,” she wrote, “sometimes so depress me, that my whole fortitude avails me nothing.”¹²⁸ This obvious unwillingness to acknowledge publicly one’s pregnancy denotes the implementation of silence in correspondence as a means by which to combat pervasive fear and lack of control. While certainly not a way to guarantee one’s safety in childbirth, omitting the truth about pregnancy did provide a measure of personal comfort to the women of this study by saving friends and family the constant worry that generally accompanied the announcement of conception. Jay further elucidated the reasoning behind this pattern of behavior, writing, “You should not my dr. sister have heard of the prospect of my increasing family 1st from a stranger, had not my fears of alarming yr. apprehensions induc’d me to be silent about it.”¹²⁹ Jay’s letter indicates something

¹²⁶ Murray, Smith, and Judith Sargent Murray Society., *From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th-Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray*, 116.

¹²⁷ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 117.

¹²⁸ Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 284.

¹²⁹ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 137.

further about intimate female communication in the years surrounding the Revolutionary War. While Jay felt comfortable confiding in a stranger about her pregnancy, she chose to omit discussion of it in letters to her sister until after the birth of her child, suggesting that women hoped to spare their closest friends and family the pain and concern felt over pregnancy.

Unfortunately, even following a seemingly safe birth, early infant death was not at all uncommon; in fact, historians estimate that as many as ten percent of eighteenth-century infants passed away in the early months following delivery, typically as a result of disease rather than injury during birth.¹³⁰ Women often expressed anxiousness in the first few weeks or months after delivery; some even chose not to announce their pregnancy in letters to others until the first few weeks had passed.¹³¹ For Jay, feelings of apprehension over the health of her daughter Anne lasted well over a month following birth; she wrote to her husband in several letters of the sickly nature of their daughter, stating in one, “To confess the truth I am not without apprehensions for her still, tho’ her fever is abated.” Perhaps even more fascinating is the sense of detachment characteristic of some women’s reference to their children, a strategy which seems to suggest their reluctance to form too close a bond with their baby until they were certain of its safety. High rates of infant mortality created an internal conflict for women in terms of their role as mother. Women were expected to serve as both educator and nurturer of their children; however, the very tangible possibility of loss made forming this attachment with a young infant exceedingly difficult. Reed, writing to her husband soon after the

¹³⁰ Richard W. Wertz and Dorothy C. Wertz, *Lying-In: A History of Childbirth in America* (New York: Free Press, 1977), 19.

¹³¹ Jay demonstrates this behavior in a letter authored to her sister Kitty in 1783 in Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 137.

birth of her daughter, evidenced the use of written detachment as a protective mechanism: “If she lives, it will make me more anxious than ever to return to dear England.”¹³²

Reed, did not assume the survival of her daughter. Rather, she elected to distance herself from the situation, choosing to neither form expectations of her infant’s health or to commit to a move back to England until a greater amount of time had passed.

Not surprisingly, women hoped to have someone both consistently available and knowledgeable on the subject with them during labor.¹³³ Several of the fifteen women of this study, in fact, expressed regret at having to give birth unattended. For Jay, who birthed two of her children overseas during her husband’s ambassadorship to Spain, the cultural difference in birthing practices left her frustrated. She wrote that, “the custom which prevails you of having a careful woman used to attend ladies in that situation does not extend here, so that one is often liable to colds & other inconveniences from the inattention or ignorance of ones own attendants.”¹³⁴ Reed, too, made mention of a similar situation. Her husband, an officer in the war, was gone during the birth of her daughter; in the month leading up to the birth, Reed expressed her concern in a letter to him. “You will not wonder so much at this, when I tell you that I must be entirely in the hands of strangers, nor know I want assistance to procure,” she wrote.¹³⁵ Following familiar patterns of childbirth—in this case, being aided by a midwife or other individual with intimate knowledge of delivery practices—brought women at least a small measure of comfort in a situation over which they had very little or no control.

¹³² Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 168.

¹³³ James M. Volo and Dorothy Denneen Volo explicate that, for women of the eighteenth century, labor was a community event; women were often attended by not only a midwife, but a midwife’s assistant and, in certain cases, a close family friend or relative as well. *Family Life in the 17th-and 18th-Century America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 188-89.

¹³⁴ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 141.

¹³⁵ Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 284.

Nearly all the women of this study express, either overtly or covertly, the numerous ways in which having a child altered the daily pattern of their lives. For some, being a parent meant giving up some of their personal activities—reading or writing, for instance—in place of spending time with their young child. “For you know I hant much time for reading,” wrote Burr, “now I have a young Child.”¹³⁶ Reed, too, shared this sense of responsibility to her children, noting in a letter to her husband, “I have been so crouded with family affairs that I could not get time to write two days past;” over time, after she gave birth to two more, she again wrote in a letter to her husband that her three children “seem to take up all my time and attention.”¹³⁷ Without question, women adored their children and sought to live up to their internal expectations of motherhood. Yet, female writings of the Revolutionary Era also indicate that women on occasion articulated a slight resentment at the ways in which parenting subsumed other important daily activities. Letters and journals of these fifteen women demonstrate that mothers of the period, more often than not, adhered to socially prescribed patterns of childrearing. Rather than choose to participate in leisure activities like reading or writing to close friends, women assigned to personal entertainment a secondary level of importance in relation to their children. As a result, these women successfully maintained gender roles of the late eighteenth century.

As expressed in their letters and journals, children took precedence over many of their other activities; for instance, those who traveled frequently with their husbands in the early years of their marriage ceased to do so following the birth of their first child. Burr, after being asked repeatedly by her friend Sarah Prince to come for a visit, wrote, “I

¹³⁶ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 50.

¹³⁷ Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 76 & 202.

find I was not settled till I had a Child, and now I am effectually settled, a journey seems a vast thing.”¹³⁸ This sentiment was echoed by Jay, who chose to stay home with her children rather than travel with her husband: “I’ve no thoughts of accompanying him, as my love of ease begins to be more predominant than my curiosity & ones ease cannot be much undulg’d when traveling with infants, nor one’s mind very tranquil in leavint hem wh. Strangers.”¹³⁹ In some instances, even the short, weekly trip to church proved impossible to make; Burr, a dedicated churchgoer, mentioned in her journal several times staying home from church to look after her daughter, Sally. She wrote, “There is duty at home as well as at the house of God.”¹⁴⁰ Further demonstrating that childrearing carried a level of importance above personal activities, Burr’s example indicates that expectations relating to motherhood served often to limit female leisure or, in this case, churchgoing. Children, as prescribed by eighteenth-century understandings of the “woman’s sphere,” were to be the most important thing in a woman’s life and, as these female writings denote, women overwhelmingly adhered to these preconceptions of behavior.

It is apparent that each of these mothers felt a very strong bond with their children. Many demonstrated repeatedly their love for their sons and daughters when writing letters to husbands and, more often, close female friends. Shippen, who raised her daughter Peggy without the assistance of her estranged husband, wrote, “I spend so much of my time in caressing & playing with Peggy that I almost forget I have any thing

¹³⁸ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 102.

¹³⁹ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 137.

¹⁴⁰ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 61.

else to do.”¹⁴¹ Abigail Adams, who spoke very little of the children in letters to her husband, nevertheless wrote at length about motherhood in those sent to her sister; she stated, “My little boys delight me and I should feel quite melancholy without them.”¹⁴² Therefore, while in some ways motherhood reinforced female status in the Revolutionary Era, it also served as a means by which to form and strengthen bonds with other women. Women could unite in writing about this intimate aspect of female domestic life with each other in a way that they simply could not with their husbands.

Children in the Revolutionary Era played an important role in the structure of the family, particularly in the case of an absent father. Jay noted on several occasions in letters to her husband of the way in which their children aided her in the myriad of household tasks that arose when he was away from home, writing, “In short, if it was not for your little Counter-parts, I should want cheerfulness & vigour to enable me to perform a variety of extra duties that devolve upon me in the consequence of your absence.”¹⁴³ Children also helped to ease the burden of loneliness many of these women felt when their husbands left the home as soldiers or statesmen, evidenced best by Burr’s description of her daughter Sally: “She is very good company when I have no other.”¹⁴⁴ Therefore, while motherhood did, in many ways, limit the lifestyle choices of women in the Revolutionary Era, the women of this study demonstrated that many women were

¹⁴¹ Livingston and Armes, *Nancy Shippen, Her Journal Book; the International Romance of a Young Lady of Fashion of Colonial Philadelphia with Letters to Her and About Her*, 147.

¹⁴² Abigail Adams and Mary Smith Cranch, *New Letters of Abigail Adams, 1788-1801* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973), 23.

¹⁴³ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 241.

¹⁴⁴ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 54.

more than willing to sacrifice personal goals for time spent with their families.¹⁴⁵

While it is more than apparent that these northern mothers felt a close bond with their children, it is important to note that a mother's role in parenting extended far beyond emotional ties. Cott has argued that "The mother-child relationship" was constituted as "a vehicle for the child's growth, not for maternal satisfaction."¹⁴⁶ This is more than borne out by the evidence; female writings of the Revolutionary period exhibit a sense of selflessness in reference to their role as female parent. Murray provided an interesting assessment of the female maternal role in her journal, writing, "She is blessed with experience as well as humanity, she is the Mistress of true politeness, and she knows how to pity, to soothe, and to encourage"; a mother is the "advisor, Protectress, and allow me to say, your only proper confidant."¹⁴⁷ As a whole, women willingly inhabited social expectations of motherhood, understanding their role as being one of primary significance. As a result, many felt exceedingly proud of it.

The mother's role as "instructress," as Murray described it, proves to be particularly fascinating.¹⁴⁸ Women in the latter portion of the eighteenth century helped to shape their position within the family by serving as educators to their children. Adams indicated in a letter to her husband the importance of teaching children proper behavior early in their lives, writing, "I have always thought it of very great importance that

¹⁴⁵ Adams and Jay echoed these sentiments; Adams, who often lamented her distant husband, wrote, "In the daytime family affairs take off my attention." (*Letters of John Adams and His Wife Abigail Adams During the Revolution* (Cranbury, NJ: Scholars Bookshelf, 2006), 125. Jay, too, expressed a similar theme in her writing, noting that the time spent with her young son helped to dissuade the extent to which she missed her husband when he was away from the home. "In telling him stories & teaching him to spell," she wrote, "I deceive many hours that would otherwise linger on unamused & sometimes unemployed." 96: , *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 59.

¹⁴⁶ Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" In New England, 1780-1835*, 91.

¹⁴⁷ Murray, Smith, and Judith Sargent Murray Society., *From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th-Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray*, 109, 35.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 135.

children should, in the early part of life, be unaccustomed to such examples as would tend to corrupt the purity of their words and actions.” Adams further detailed, a bad parental example “neither time nor custom can totally eradicate.”¹⁴⁹ Mercy Warren, too, spoke of the necessity of teaching children by proper example, writing in a letter to Adams of the requisite that a mother “Early impress the youthful mind.”¹⁵⁰ As Adams and Warren both indicated, female position within the larger family structure was one of significant importance; although certainly not in an outward sense, the mother was inwardly as vital as the father in orchestrating the proper functioning of the family unit.

For these women, education served as a fundamental responsibility of motherhood. It is particularly interesting to see that many began to assess their children’s education long before the child was old enough to even speak; Shippen, for example, observed of her very young infant, “I thought seriously this Morn about my sweet Childs education. I form’d many schemes which I believe it would be very difficult to put in execution.”¹⁵¹ Education was a central and necessary concern for mothers like Shippen, who often found themselves thinking at length over both the type of at-home education they would provide, along with, for the more affluent, where their children would be sent to school when they grew older. Many of these mothers were often preoccupied with concern over providing the proper education in the household for their children, as evidenced best by Jay, whose fear over her daughter Maria’s lack of speech as a toddler prompted several letters to her parents, sisters, and husband. Jay wrote in a letter to her

¹⁴⁹ Charles Francis Adams, *Familiar Letters of John Adams and His Wife Abigail Adams During the Revolution* (Cranbury, NJ: Scholars Bookshelf, 2006), 36.

¹⁵⁰ L. H. Butterfield, Marc Friedlaender, and Richard Alan Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence, The Adams Papers. Series Ii* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), V. I: 87.

¹⁵¹ Livingston and Armes, *Nancy Shippen, Her Journal Book; the International Romance of a Young Lady of Fashion of Colonial Philadelphia with Letters to Her and About Her*, 147.

father, "Can you, my dr. sir, account for the backwardness of speech in my children? Peter in deed may alledge the want of his mother's example, but what excuse can be found out for Maria who is a great deal with me, & is very active except with her tongue."¹⁵² Jay later wrote of her youngest son's lessons at home, demonstrating the important position a mother held in providing an educational basis for a child's future success in the public world: "I wish him to be proficient in these first & not least necessary branches of Education before he leaves home & loses the parental care."¹⁵³ A good mother, then, laid at an early age the groundwork for all future educational endeavors for her children. In this way, women were vital in providing for their children within the home the instructive tools they needed to succeed during adulthood.

Instruction in the home, of course, was not limited solely to matters relating to scholarly education. Mothers in the Revolutionary Era also taught concepts of patriotism to their children. The Republican Mother, as Linda Kerber has famously argued, "was to encourage in her sons civic interest and participation. She was to educate her children and guide them in the paths of morality and virtue."¹⁵⁴ Jay excitedly wrote of her son's response to his lessons in patriotism, evidencing the desire amongst American mothers to pass on patriot belief systems to their children: "Tho' he is too young to be entrusted with powder, I am glad to find that my little spark had kindled upon that occasion, & am pleas'd when I reflect that where he is, the sentiments of Liberty will be cherish'd in him by education, & not suffer'd to expire like his own little squibs in the first effort"¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 139.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁵⁴ Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, 283.

¹⁵⁵ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 118.

Norton further discusses this conceptualization, noting that while republican motherhood served as a step toward nineteenth-century feminism, in many ways the dual nature of the role in the late eighteenth century instead contained women within the family; Norton writes, “The image of the republican mother had two sides: if one innovatively stressed the importance of women’s political role, the other conservatively emphasized the significance of their domestic role.”¹⁵⁶

Of course, not all women felt themselves innately equipped with the skills necessary to be a good mother. Many mention receiving parenting tips from friends or family. Shippen, for instance, wrote in her journal of learning proper mothering techniques from her grandmother, adding, “for sure I am a very young & inexperienced mother.”¹⁵⁷ Jay, too, wrote of the example her own parents provided her in her own motherhood. “I’ve often experienced the truth of an observation I’ve heard from her that Children rarely know the extent of their obligations to their parents until they become parents themselves,” she wrote.¹⁵⁸ As these examples demonstrate, women internalized elevated expectations of motherhood of which they had a great deal of difficulty living up to.

A fascinating and more concealed theme linked to motherhood is that of family planning. While several women expressed feelings of exhaustion in reference to taking care of their children, particularly those with absent husbands, only one woman explicitly mentioned a desire to regulate the number of pregnancies she would experience. Reed,

¹⁵⁶ Mary Beth Norton, “The Evolution of White Women’s Experience in Early America,” *American Historical Review* 89 (June 1984): 618.

¹⁵⁷ Livingston and Armes, *Nancy Shippen, Her Journal Book; the International Romance of a Young Lady of Fashion of Colonial Philadelphia with Letters to Her and About Her*, 140.

¹⁵⁸ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 124.

after giving birth to two children, a son and a daughter, wrote, “I wish I could stop with that number, but I don’t expect that.”¹⁵⁹ Certainly Reed was not the only woman of these fifteen who wished to limit her family—Warren, interestingly, did not give birth to her first child until almost four years after her marriage, although the reasons for this delay are unknown—but, as Cott asserts in *The Bonds of Womanhood*, reliable contraceptive opportunities simply were not available in the eighteenth century. As Cott notes, “First, women could not control conception with certainty, except by abstinence from sexual relations.”¹⁶⁰ Additionally, while Ulrich does mention in *A Midwife’s Tale* that the use of certain contraceptives and abortifacients—savine or the tansy plant, for instance—were becoming increasingly common in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, they were by no means widespread, safe, or completely effective.¹⁶¹ The missing discussion of techniques of family planning in female letters, journals, and memoirs designates that women found themselves tied to social expectations of motherhood in the Revolutionary Era and, while a few notable exceptions sought to transcend commonly held ideals of womanhood, analysis of the mothers of this study indicates that such circumnavigation was a rarity.

These women, of course, were only one part of the family unit; how, then, did they write about and understand the parenting role of their husbands? It becomes quickly apparent that the position of the father within the family as discussed by these fifteen women was just as complex and intricate as that of the mother. These writers suggest that the father served as the public head of the household. If, in the absence of some of

¹⁵⁹ Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 181.

¹⁶⁰ Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" In New England, 1780-1835*, 90.

¹⁶¹ Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*, 56, 402, 378-79. See also Angus McLaren, *Reproductive Rituals: The Perception of Fertility in England from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth Century* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), 73-75, 89-106.

their husbands, many wives took on roles not typically ascribed to them, their writings reflect that the father remained the figurative leader of the family. Morris, recently widowed, wrote in her journal in reference to this patriarchal understanding of the familial unit, calling her family “My little flock, too, without a father to direct them how to steer.”¹⁶²

Within their position as the head of the Revolutionary Era family, fathers were likewise recognized as the primary arbiters of authority and punishment. Fathers, like mothers, were expected to lead their families by example, thereby instilling in their children good manners and obedience; however, when a child acted out, it was the father who was expected to first mete out the necessary punishment. Jay, noting that their youngest daughter had been “very fractious these two or three weeks,” requested her husband’s return home, writing, “I need not tell you how effectually you[r] presence would obviate any difficulty on that score since his implicit obedience to whatever appeared to be your pleasure is too recent not be recollected.”¹⁶³ While many women did overtake the activities of their husbands in their absence, outwardly they reinforced the proper allocation of male and female gender roles.

It is important to note, however, that women placed limits upon acceptable punishment; while a measure of obedience was expected by mothers, and in some cases even required, Bailey’s discussion of her husband’s tyrannical treatment of their children serves as a primary example of a father who surpassed what was considered normative behavior. Bailey’s husband, though an aberration in this study, proved to be verbally—

¹⁶² Margaret Morris, *Private Journal Kept During the Revolutionary War, Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution* (New York: New York Times, 1969), 6.

¹⁶³ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 49.

and, as Bailey later discovered, sexually—abusive toward their young children, causing her to write in her journal, “He had ever been sovereign, severe and hard with his children, and they stood in the greatest fear of him.”¹⁶⁴ While a woman was to serve as the primary familial comforter, husbands, too, were expected to share in the responsibility; those who strayed from this model by abusing their children provided the mother with significant grounds for divorce.

A father’s position of authority, then, should not be taken to mean that they were to have no emotional connection with their children. Female writings abound with examples of the love fathers felt for their children. In 1755, Esther Burr wrote to her close friend Sarah Prince: “You my dear cant imagine how much pleased of late Mr Burr is with his little Daughter.”¹⁶⁵ Likewise, for those husbands that spent a majority of the Revolutionary period distant from their families, it becomes equally apparent that their children greatly missed the presence of their father; Jay discussed an anecdote of Maria, her young daughter, in which she ran in her father’s room to see him without realizing he was still absent. Jay wrote, “Maria saw the door open, & with her usual glee when going to see you, she came running into the room, when all on a sudden disappointment succeeded expectation & her little head droop’d.”¹⁶⁶ Although women, in many aspects, served as parental leaders, Jay’s example demonstrates that mother and father worked together to successfully love, support, and provide for the family unit as a whole.

¹⁶⁴ Bailey and Smith, *Memoirs of Mrs. Abigail Bailey*, 33.

¹⁶⁵ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 84.

¹⁶⁶ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 143.

Perhaps most notable of female discussion of parental roles is the reciprocal relationship between mother and father in childrearing. Many women discussed the ways in which husband and wife ought to work together in order to raise their children properly. Adams, for instance, wrote in a letter to her husband, “Our little ones, whom you so often recommend to my care and instruction, shall not be deficient in virtue or probity, if the precepts of a mother have their desired effect; but they would be doubly enforced, could they be indulged with the example of a father alternately before them.”¹⁶⁷ While women provided the primary behavioral model for their children, a father’s example proved to be of particular importance as well in shaping a child’s upbringing. Murray likewise discussed the role played by both mother and father in raising their children, noting that the mother ought to be “tender, indulgent, and judicious,” while the father was to provide shelter. For Murray, husband, wife, and their offspring “complete a circle, in which uniform complacency and good nature uninterruptedly reign.”¹⁶⁸ Expected divisions of labor specified which parental activities were to be performed by men and which by women. Yet, in the end, it was the well-being of the children, rather than separation of gender roles, that defined a well-functioning family.

While it would be a gross overestimation to assume that all women of the Revolution chose to accept the ideology of motherhood as the ultimate female vocation, a majority of women in the time period did, in fact, share in the vicissitudes of pregnancy, childbirth, and child-rearing: and, as a result, formed close bonds of sisterhood with each other through experiences shared within the intimate network of female correspondence. Female adherence to comparable patterns of conception—age of first pregnancy, child

¹⁶⁷ Adams, *Familiar Letters of John Adams and His Wife Abigail Adams During the Revolution*, 170.

¹⁶⁸ Murray, Smith, and Judith Sargent Murray Society., *From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th-Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray*, 134, 209.

spacing, and overall number of children—indicates that social expectations of a woman's domestic role, though undergoing a slow shift following the American Revolution, had changed little in the centuries following settlement. Elevation amidst the northern female community of their children to the highest domestic priority, over personal leisure, travel, and even religion, likewise denotes continued acceptance of socially-acceptable divisions of women's labor in the home. However, despite its continuing reinforcement of patriarchal authority, motherhood brought to those who experienced it unquestionable joy, entertainment, and much-needed company and assistance in the absence of one's husband.

CHAPTER 3

“SO MUCH FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT”: THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FEMALE DOMESTIC EXPERIENCE

While in many senses marriage and motherhood reinforced pervasive understandings of patriarchal authority in the years surrounding the American Revolution, domestic tasks, treatment of illness, and responses to death served to instead provide women with a distinct opportunity to reassert both themselves and the significance of their position within the home. The fifteen women of this study expressed a large measure of personal domestic freedom in their writing: in ordering daily chores, entertaining guests, farming, and even administering the family economy. Similarly, although patterns of daily life were often threatened by illness and death during the second half of the eighteenth century, female reactions to such events suggest great consideration, insight, and personal reflection. Women not only were responsible for nursing children, husbands, distant relatives, and servants back to health during illness, but served often as the sole decision maker in the heavy choice of whether or not to inoculate. Moreover, while the women of this study overwhelmingly adhered to acceptable models of mourning and burial, the prominence of death within the domestic sphere allowed friends and female family members to connect intimately and, as a result, formulate a network of support for those who felt unable to outwardly grieve.

Domesticity

Female writing in the Revolutionary period was saturated with discussion of woman's private labor within the home. Domestic tasks permeated the daily life of women in the latter portion of the eighteenth century, both married and single, parent and

childless. Joan Gundersen discusses the world of domesticity in the eighteenth century, emphasizing the growing separation of public and private with the early emergence of both the market economy and ideals of domesticity. “When the nineteenth-century Americans reinvented the home as a private space infused with piety and nurture, and separate from politics and the market,” she writes, “they also lost the ability to see the public nature of women’s lives during the Revolution.”¹ Therefore, while other themes relating to the eighteenth-century “woman’s sphere” served primarily to hold women within their ascribed place, domestic tasks and responses to illness and death gave to women the opportunity to exercise independence, particularly in the absence of their husbands.

Discussions of performing the mundane, everyday domestic tasks necessary to a smoothly running household saturate female diaries and letters. One finds mention of numerous daily activities in which these fifteen women partook—ranging from baking to knitting—and the level of importance they were assigned. Knitting, for instance, reappeared in several women’s diaries as an integral domestic task. In 1777, Sally Wister wrote in her journal, “I have set a stocking on the needles and intend to be mighty industrious.”² One might choose to rise earlier than usual in order to complete a particularly large volume of daily work, as Wister later makes note of in her diary, writing, “Rose at half past four this morning, iron’d industriously till one o’clock”³ However, Abigail Adams best discusses the central domestic role played by the wife in the Revolutionary Era, particularly during the period of nonimportation; noting the

¹ Joan R. Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World: Women in Revolutionary America, 1740-1790*, Rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 168.

² Sarah Wister and Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola, *The Journal and Occasional Writings of Sarah Wister* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 1987), 44.

³ *Ibid.*, 66.

difficulty by which one had to obtain colonial textiles, Adams wrote, “I find as much as I can do to manufacture clothing for my family, which would else be naked.”⁴ Women took their domestic tasks very seriously, understanding their labor within the home as essential to the maintenance and proper functioning of their family as a whole.⁵ In fact, domesticity assumed such a high level of performance that the women of this study were willing to even forfeit sleep in order to complete necessary household activities.

It becomes quickly apparent that for a woman in the second half of the eighteenth century, household tasks provided the backbone for a constant daily routine. Nancy Shippen indicated the domestic schedule she followed nearly every morning, writing, “Work’d at my needle in the morning as usual, & read.”⁶ The possibility of shirking ones duties within the home appears unimaginable; domestic work continued, even under the most serious of circumstances. For instance, Sarah Hodgkins wrote in a letter to her husband, a Continental soldier, “I could not write much I have been very busy all day to day making you a Shirte,” which she intended to mail as quickly as possible to her husband. This appears as a particularly notable entry considering her sewing was performed in the midst of heavy cannon fire.⁷ Hodgkins’ example demonstrates yet again that even household manufacturing was assigned a significant level of importance within female writing, particularly for those whose husbands were actively fighting in the war.

⁴ Charles Francis Adams, *Familiar Letters of John Adams and His Wife Abigail Adams During the Revolution* (Cranbury, NJ: Scholars Bookshelf, 2006), 150.

⁵ Carol Berkin notes that eighteenth-century white farm women performed a greater volume of household manufacturing than did previous generations; this was due largely to the influx of and accessibility to a wider array of household equipment. *First Generations: Women in Colonial America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 141.

⁶ Anne Home Shippen Livingston and Ethel Armes, *Nancy Shippen, Her Journal Book; the International Romance of a Young Lady of Fashion of Colonial Philadelphia with Letters to Her and About Her* (New York: B. Blom, 1968), 139.

⁷ Herbert T. Wade and Robert A. Lively, *This Glorious Cause; the Adventures of Two Company Officers in Washington's Army* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958), 204.

“Their work is not to be treated lightly,” historian Maria R. Miller has noted, as women were responsible for providing to their family a myriad of necessary labors relating to textiles: laundry, mending, performing alterations, and even assembling day-to-day attire.⁸

The household routine clearly took precedence over leisurely pursuits. In many cases, it was letter writing that suffered as a result of a particularly overwhelming daily amount of housework. In a letter to her friend Sarah Prince following numerous days of silence, Esther Edwards Burr wrote that “These several days I could not get one minutes [rest] to say one word to you, for I had a quilt on the fra[me] and my Ironing to do, and could get no help.”⁹ Later speaking of Mr. Burr’s desire that she learn French, Burr informed Prince that, while she would enjoy learning, she simply did not have the time. “The married women has something elce to care about besides lerning French,” she wrote, admitting, “if I had time I should be very fond of lerning, but I must give up writing to you if I did, and I could not bare that.”¹⁰ Burr’s examples not only denote that women found domestic tasks exhausting—and not always fulfilling—work; they also demonstrate that, in many cases, entertainment suffered at the hands of necessary household activities.

While it is not often explicitly mentioned, one also discerns within female writings a pervasive sense of exhaustion toward daily domestic tasks and, in some cases, a strong feeling of aversion toward them. Those who discussed their feelings toward housework unequivocally spoke of the fatigue they felt as a result of the daily routine.

⁸ Marla R. Miller, *The Needle's Eye: Women and Work in the Age of Revolution* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 57.

⁹ Esther Edwards Burr, Carol F. Karlsen, and Laurie Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 57.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

Burr served as an excellent example of this, writing in her journal of her weariness at household cleaning, “Wednesday, and Thursday, and Fryday, all up in Arms a cleaning House, white-washing, rubing Tables, cleaning silver, China and Glass, etc. And poor *I* am almost tired out of my senses.”¹¹ For Jemima Condict, who mentioned chores only on rare occasion, her journal entry on weaving speaks volumes as to her aversion of these daily domestic tasks: “It likes not me.”¹² Although women did express their sense of accomplishment at completing household labor, discussion of the resulting fatigue proved to be just as common. In this sense, domestic activities were, for women, both an avenue of achievement and a burden.

Depending upon one’s social standing, some of the daily domestic tasks performed by these women might be alleviated by the assistance of a servant. Nancy Shippen, Sarah Livingston Jay, Abigail Adams, and Esther Edwards Burr all noted their reliance on domestics within their homes and offered comments on the numerous ways in which servants supported women in their household activities. In a letter to her husband, Jay observed the heavy burden taken up by household servants, noting, “Indeed it is incredible how much our tranquility depends upon our servants.”¹³ Burr, too, mentioned the assistance she received from hired help, writing to her best friend that “A woman here Ironing for me, and I am very busy mending stockings and one thing and another, so would beg your pardon for this day.”¹⁴ The high volume of duties assigned to women within the home necessitated that many women—particularly those who were more

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹² Jemima Condict et al., *Jemima Condict, Her Book: Being a Transcript of the Diary of an Essex County Maid During the Revolutionary War* (Newark, N.J.: The Carteret Book Club, 1930), 14.

¹³ John Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2004), 207.

¹⁴ Burr, Karlson, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 95.

affluent—delegate certain tasks to household servants.¹⁵ Rather than being a source of degradation, the employment of servants allowed women to further assert their position as head of domestic activities within the home and, furthermore, to participate more frequently in activities they otherwise would not have the time for, like reading and writing.

It is of particular interest to note the ways in which these women viewed their servants and their position within the household. While, as expected, domestics are rarely mentioned unless either ill or causing trouble, it becomes quickly apparent that many of the women in this study formed close bonds with their servants. Burr, for instance, stayed home from church and abstained from letter writing for the entire period of a servant's illness, even referring to the servant as "famaly."¹⁶ Phillis Wheatley provided an excellent observation of the servant-housewife relationship in the Revolutionary Era from the opposing perspective, speaking fondly of the husband and wife who were once her masters. Even after her manumission, Wheatley noted several instances of traveling to visit Mr. and Mrs. Wheatley on Sundays.¹⁷ Following the passing of Mrs. Wheatley, with whom Phillis Wheatley had developed an extraordinarily close mother-daughter relationship, she wrote, "By the great loss I have sustain'd of my best friend, I feel like One forsake by her parent in a desolate wilderness."¹⁸ Even from the perspective of the slave or servant, the familial-like relationship between domestic and female head of household appeared to be a reciprocal one. Other women writers

¹⁵Carol Berkin, *First Generations: Women in Colonial America*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 140.

¹⁶Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 90.

¹⁷William Henry Robinson and Phillis Wheatley, *Phillis Wheatley and Her Writings, Critical Studies on Black Life and Culture; V. 12* (New York: Garland, 1984), 315.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 339.

expressed similar understandings of their relationship with household servants, indicating that the formation of a sympathetic bond with domestic workers was not at all uncommon. In fact, just as housewives bonded with each other over collective experiences of marriage, motherhood, and domesticity, women formed attachments with their servants over shared domestic activities.¹⁹

In managing their servants, the women of this study demonstrate yet another way in which they exercised personal authority. Certainly, in the absence of one's husband, the burden of management fell squarely on the shoulders of the wife and, as several women demonstrated, they proved more than able to complete the task at hand in an exemplary manner. Jay, for instance, appraised her husband of her management of their two domestics, Mrs. Low and Mrs. Harrison. Though both were engaged in a personal argument, Jay noted her success in solving the problem. "I have managed the affair in a manner that suits myself & satisfies them," she wrote. "So much for the home department."²⁰ In fact, so confident of her administrative abilities in the household, Jay later wrote to her husband that "Our domestic concerns have never been conducted with so much facility as at present."²¹ In serving as household manager, women found a significant means by which to exert control over the domestic sphere. While many prescribed female activities in the home limited women's autonomy in the Revolutionary Era, the implementation of the housewife as domestic administrator provided women

¹⁹ Other women of this study treated their domestic servants in a similar manner; Abigail Adams, for instance, noted in a letter to Thomas Jefferson that her family's servants took leave of them in tears, "which gave us that painfull kind of pleasure, which arises from a consciousness, that the good will of our dependants is not misplaced." John Adams et al., *The Adams-Jefferson Letters* (Chapel Hill, : Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg Va., 1959), 28.

²⁰ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 210.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 207.

with both a sense of personal satisfaction and a significant measure of influence within the familial unit.

Entertaining guests served as another pervasive part of the daily domestic routine. In many instances, the women of this study were thankful to enjoy the reprieve from domesticity that company provided, particularly when their husbands were absent. However, equally present throughout female writings of this time period was the notion that the constant influx of guests in the home left one feeling emotionally and physically fatigued. Burr, whose elevated social position in Stockbridge, Massachusetts left her entertaining guests on a near-daily basis, wrote repeatedly of her exhaustion; seemingly tired of the constant influx of company in her home, she noted, “The same story—P.M. A Room full of company, not the most agreeable.” “Know sooner is the house emptyd,” she wrote, “but filled again.”²² Explicitly acknowledging her in journal that, in many instances the volume of company proved overwhelming, Burr added, “I am almost wore out and tired of *staying* here, for living I cant call it.”²³ The writings of other women mirrored Burr’s sentiments on the constant pressure of entertaining guests in addition to performing typical household chores; while many women were appreciative of the gesture and enjoyed time spent with close friends, entertaining socially often served only to increase the already seemingly endless list of activities within the home.²⁴

²² Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 62.

²³ *Ibid.*, 71, 95.

²⁴ Nancy Shippen expressed dislike and even boredom in reference to entertaining guests: “Found a great deal of company—a great part of it insignificant and trifling.” Livingston and Ames, *Nancy Shippen, Her Journal Book; the International Romance of a Young Lady of Fashion of Colonial Philadelphia with Letter to Her and About Her*, 139. Jay also described an instance of a guest overstaying her welcome in Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 201. Esther Reed likewise indicated her frustration with the numerous invitations to dinner she and her husband received in Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 165.

The administration of the family economy provided another avenue by which women asserted their personal agency. A primary category through which women held control in purchasing was that of food; Jay displayed her personal agency both in choosing her daily activities and procuring food for her family, writing, “This day I rode out to see some sick people, and to do country business, such as speak for Winter Tirnips, Apples, and syder, and butter.”²⁵ Many of these women revealed in their journals an intimate awareness with food prices and quality, denoting their close familiarity with the outside market; and, while in some cases they deferred to their husbands for advice on food purchases, women overwhelmingly made the decisions themselves in the absence of the male figure.

Jay’s letters to her husband, parents, and two sisters demonstrate another avenue by which women exercised personal agency: setting up and decorating a new home. Married to a statesman, Jay traveled all over France, Spain and England in the years following 1779. Jay was given the task of purchasing furniture and necessities for their new home. In a letter to John Jay she described her activities, writing, “This mornng. I went to Paris to speak to Poussin & to make some purchases.”²⁶ While the house remained unoccupied until her husband’s return home, Jay could barely contain her excitement at the anticipation of her husband’s first look at the finished product. “It is so gay, so lively,” she wrote of the new house, “that I am sure you’ll be pleased with it... Dr. Franklin & his Grandsons & Mr. and Mrs. Cays & the Miss Walpoles drank tea wh. me likewise this Evening & they all approve of yr. Choice.”²⁷ For those of this study that possessed the financial means, decorating within the familial home was an arena reserved

²⁵ Ibid., 51.

²⁶ Ibid., 146.

²⁷ Ibid., 147.

for women and, as a result, yet another means by which women domestically transcended expectations that they would in all matters defer to their husbands.

In the latter portion of the eighteenth century, women stepped up in many ways to fill typically male-oriented roles left vacant by distant husbands; while as Norton argues, in 1750 colonial husbands “kept the reins of financial management firmly in their own hands,” it appears that the events of the Revolution provided to these women the opportunity to educate themselves on—and participate in—financial matters.²⁸

Participation in the financial aspects of the household ranged from purchasing clothing and other family essentials at their own discretion—for instance, Jay noted that she was “Out erly in the Morn on business, got Me a long Scarlet Cloth Cloke and some other things for family use”—to performing banking transactions, collecting debts, and altering household farming practices.²⁹ A clear example of this is seen in a letter Jay wrote to her husband in reference to business in Jamaica, in which she notes that, “The money which I have received for you on that Debt, not being able to loan, I have embarked in the National Bank.”³⁰ It is, of course, important to emphasize that the events of the American Revolution allowed women to contribute publicly in ways that were considered improper after the end of the war. However, this does not make the financial transactions of the women in this study any less significant. The fiscal knowledge women acquired during the Revolutionary period could not be unlearned and, as a result, provided women with a sense of confidence they could apply to other areas of their lives.

²⁸ Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*, 1st ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980).

²⁹ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 74.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 235.

Likewise, participation in farming serves as yet another instance in which women subsumed a role typically designated as male in the absence of their husbands. Indicating the ways in which women ran the family economy in the place of a distant husband, Reed noted that she and her family proved able to maintain the daily flow of farm life as though nothing had changed; she wrote, “We go on pretty well in our country life, our hay was got in in very good time and order.”³¹ It is particularly interesting to note that Reed, in fact, even developed a growing interest in diversifying their farm crop, writing to her husband, “I have some thoughts of sowing a little flax.”³² Adams, too, denoted in her writing the sense that, in the absence of her husband, tasks related to farming had become a daily part of her domestic activities. Repeatedly referring to the family cattle as “my cows,” Adams wrote in a letter to her husband, “I hope in time to have the reputation of being as good a *farmeress* as my partner has of being a good statesman.”³³ As Reed and Adams clearly exemplify, women took great pride—and liberty—in their management of familial finances. Eighteenth-century women repeatedly proved that they could excel at tasks generally oriented toward men; and, over time, women like Adams went so far as to consider chores relating to livestock and farming as their own.

For those women that served as the female head of the household, there existed a significant measure of personal freedom in carrying out chores both inside the home and on the farm; Joan M. Jensen writes that for the women that subsumed the position of household leadership during their husbands’ absence, their “status as householder

³¹ William B. Reed and Esther Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed, Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution. Series Iii* (New York: The New York Times, 1971), 268.

³² *Ibid.*, 269.

³³ Adams, *Familiar Letters of John Adams and His Wife Abigail Adams During the Revolution*, 30, 152.

brought women considerable independence and visibility in historical records as well.”³⁴

Women in the North, in fact, employed a variety of means by which to step beyond generally prescribed gender roles. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich provides clear analysis of such behavior in *Good Wives*, noting that the female position of “deputy husband” demonstrates the elastic division that separated the roles of husband and wife. Under the guise of “deputy husbands,” women performed “male” work in purchasing goods, dealing with finances, presiding over servants, and negotiating with Indians. Ulrich posits, “In homes and in neighborhoods women protected and promoted their own interests, using their influence as consorts and mothers, their authority as housewives and deputy husbands, their power as friendly neighbors, and their stature as experienced Christians.”³⁵

Through managing household servants, implementation of daily domestic tasks, and entertaining, the wife and mother exerted a great deal of personal freedom. It was entirely up to her to decide when and what chores she would perform each day, and, particularly when a husband was away from the home, whether or not to accept an invitation to entertain. Likewise, the Revolutionary Era housewife could exercise considerable control within the family economy: in making purchases, decorating the home, participating in monetary transactions, and subsuming farming activities. Furthermore, as will be discussed in the next chapter, domestic administration provided another avenue by which women of the period could form intimate homosocial bonds by

³⁴ Joan M. Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women, 1750-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 38.

³⁵ Laurel Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 240.

sharing anecdotes, providing advice, and commiserating with each other in a safe environment.

Illness and Death

Another pervasive theme of female domestic life in the Revolutionary era was that of illness and death. The women of this study demonstrate a near-preoccupation with the health of friends and family, and for good reason: illness—including smallpox, measles, and yellow fever—in the latter portion of the eighteenth century, due largely to the influx and constant movement of soldiers brought on by the American Revolution, was an inescapable part of daily life for these women.³⁶ In fact, concurrent with the years of the war was a national outbreak of the *Variola* virus, smallpox, which took the lives of countless individuals between the years of 1775 and 1782. The smallpox virus was exceedingly deadly during the period, particularly for those rural individuals who received little exposure to the disease during childhood; to put it into perspective, historian Elizabeth A. Fenn posits that, during a 1792 outbreak of the illness in Boston, the fatality rate for smallpox reached thirty percent.³⁷ In general, historians note that for colonists of European descent, approximately one out of seven or eight individuals infected with smallpox died as a result. For Native Americans, that percentage was much higher.³⁸

It should come as no surprise, then, that good health often received an exclamation of gratitude. For Condict, who watched many of her friends and neighbors

³⁶ Nancy Isenberg and Andrew Burstein, *Mortal Remains: Death in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 56-67.

³⁷ Elizabeth A. Fenn, *Pox Americana: The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-82*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 21.

³⁸ Linda Grant De Pauw, Conover Hunt, and Miriam Schneir, *Remember the Ladies: Women in America, 1750-1815* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 35.

die as the result of measles and smallpox epidemics in 1775 and 1776, personal health and well being were causes for thanks. “O What a fine thing is health!” she wrote in her journal.³⁹ Burr echoed the sentiment in a letter to Sarah Prince, writing, “These people that are never sick don’t know how great a mercy helth is. I am sure I should not, but you my dear as well [as] my self know enough of sickness to prize *helth* above *wealth*.”⁴⁰ Health, for those living in the period surrounding the American Revolution, was a central concern over which women exercised no real command; however, women often sought to employ several behavioral patterns, indicating a solid attempt to regain a measure of control in their discussion of illness with husbands, female friends, and family members.

Women proved more than willing to discuss personal health in letters. However, it is important to note that the women of this study tended to downplay the seriousness of an illness, particularly when writing letters to their husbands or extremely close friends. While women were quick to note when they felt well, a serious illness might be mentioned either in passing or, in Murray’s case, not at all. Despite contracting a severe case of smallpox from her inoculation, Murray failed to mention her fragile state for several weeks, finally writing in a letter to her sister, “You will, my dearest Girl, account for my silence when you are informed that I have been extremely ill, and that, with a disorder which rendered it presumptuous to address any of my friends.”⁴¹ In a letter written to her husband, Jay indicates another method employed by women relating to health: providing constant reassurance. Her letter demonstrates the all-encompassing position held by health in the daily domestic lives of women in the eighteenth century.

³⁹ Condict et al., *Jemima Condict, Her Book: Being a Transcript of the Diary of an Essex County Maid During the Revolutionary War*, 39.

⁴⁰ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 57.

⁴¹ Judith Sargent Murray and Sharon M. Harris, *Selected Writings of Judith Sargent Murray, Women Writers in English 1350-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 89.

“When I wrote you that I was unwell with a cold,” she wrote. “It is in order to remove any anxiety you may feel on that account that I again trouble you with another letter, as I am perfectly recovered.”⁴² A pronouncement to friends or family members of poor health had grave implications, particularly as illnesses resulting in death were far from uncommon. Many women, therefore, chose to maintain within their circle of correspondence normative daily patterns of behavior by omitting—or downplaying—the seriousness of an illness.

Female writings of the Revolutionary Era reveal that the persistent nature of illness in the period fomented amongst women a near-obsession with personal wellness. Murray, traveling with her husband in 1790, wrote at length in her journal of the precautions she took to avoid sickness. Demonstrating a palpable fear of illness, she noted in one entry, “We have met the Influenza wherever we have sojourned—It hath passed through every Town and Village and almost every dwelling and it hath been in many instances fatal—Hitherto we have escaped this contagious and afflicting disorder and we indulge a hope that our continued exercise and change of air will secure us from its attacks.”⁴³ As a result, Murray discussed the actions taken to ward against personal illness: “Exercise, and change of air, as you know, hath always been friendly to me—I have a fine appetite, and increase in size, more than I could wish.”⁴⁴

Matters relating to health surface as a primary concern in women’s letters to their husbands, denoting a very realistic fear that he might catch some kind of sickness while

⁴² Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 44.

⁴³ Judith Sargent Murray, Bonnie Hurd Smith, and Judith Sargent Murray Society., *From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th-Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Judith Sargent Murray Society and Curious Traveller Press, 1998), 87.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

away from home. Jay, for instance, addressed her husband's health in nearly every letter she authored to him. Mirroring the behavior of many other women in this study, a husband's mention of any sort of potential malady led to obvious concern and, in Jay's case, repetitive questioning. She wrote, "I fear you are not candid & that while you amuse me with accounts of a sore throat you are more seriously indispos'd. Kind heaven! Avert my fears."⁴⁵ Burr likewise demonstrated this pattern of behavior, writing in her journal of her husband, who was not feeling well when he left for his travels, "I am so concernd about his helth."⁴⁶ Craving reassurance, the women of this study implored their husbands to provide the comfort of knowing their men were safe and in good health.

Equally notable within these fifteen women's writings was an omnipresent concern for their children's well being. One gleans from female letters, journals, and memoirs in the Revolutionary period an imminent sense of foreboding when a child grew ill, further demonstrating the tenuous hold young children, particularly during illness, had on life. "My dear Little Sally has been very sick and as we feard near to death," wrote Burr in her journal, "but Gods goodness is continued and repeated in spareing her as yet, perhaps only to give us time to prepare us for the sore trial we have apprehended so nigh."⁴⁷ Jay, too, expressed concern in a letter to her sister Kitty over her daughter's illness during a trip, writing, "To compleat my distress my dr. little babe as well as her Cousin took the Hooping-Cough in our Journey & the difficulty of struggling with that was increas'd by a fever which she caught from me & frequent fasting when I was too ill

⁴⁵ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 156.

⁴⁶ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 51.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

to suckle her.”⁴⁸ For children of the period, even the slightest illness could have serious complications or life-threatening consequences; however, female reactions to such fears have much to say about a woman’s domestic role in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Women exhibited a reluctance to discuss a child’s physical condition with others, most notably a distant husband. Previous assessments of female conceptualizations of fatherhood denote that the women of this study were more than willing to discuss their child’s education and daily activities with a husband; therefore, it cannot be assumed that their disinclination to address matters relating to poor health lie in female perceptions of their husband’s disinterest. Rather, letters indicate that women were simply afraid to talk about the vigor of their children for fear that the child’s condition might worsen; moreover, their silence served as a means by which to maintain a father’s peace of mind in his absence. Burr’s letter to her husband best evinced this principle, stating, “Little Peter continues active & well, I dare not trust myself to say more of him lest I should say too much.”⁴⁹ Just as they receded from discussing the specifics of their own health with others, women were disinclined to provide details on well-being of their children. In this sense, silence was a means—albeit a decidedly passive one—by which to regain power over their child’s health: and, as a result, serves as an excellent demonstration of female strength and assertion of power in the domestic sphere.

The wife and mother played a central and necessary role, then, in maintaining the health of those in the household in the years following 1763. Shippen, for instance, makes clear the extent to which a mother’s care was completely wrapped up in that of her

⁴⁸ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 120.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

sick child. “Today my sweet infant was taken sick,” she wrote. “She will now engross my time & care.”⁵⁰ Shippen demonstrates that a primary duty of the mother was to watch carefully over a sick child, devoting themselves both day and night to their son or daughter’s health. Burr notes this as well, observing, “Sukey and I have been obliged to watch every Night ever since her sickness [*so*] that I am almost got to be as bad as the Child.”⁵¹ Women often found themselves emotionally defeated by their inability to cure a chronically ill child. Reed, for example, revealed a palpable sense of helplessness over her eldest daughter, sickly from birth. Letters to Reed’s sister, however, are characterized by an almost unsympathetic treatment of her daughter’s physical state, a coping mechanism of detachment seen often in the event of a child’s serious illness; she wrote, “My children well except the eldest, whose constitution is very delicate, and is often drooping.”⁵² Without question, Reed’s frank discussion of her daughter’s condition did not stem from a lack of emotional involvement; rather, those who had in their care a child in persistent poor health—a common experience for women in the Revolutionary Era—sought often to minimize the severity of the illness in letters written to others.

Numerous women of the Revolutionary period chose to take on the role of nurse in addition to their daily domestic activities. Some women explicitly acknowledged this role; Jay, for example, referred to herself as “a nurse as well as Wife.”⁵³ In fact, an overwhelming majority of the women in this study participated in activities one might designate as belonging to the medical profession. Jay, for instance, discussed the medication of her daughter Maria, whom she identified as being infected with thrush, a

⁵⁰ Livingston and Armes, *Nancy Shippen, Her Journal Book; the International Romance of a Young Lady of Fashion of Colonial Philadelphia with Letters to Her and About Her*, 141.

⁵¹ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 114.

⁵² Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 247.

⁵³ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 158.

fungal disease of the mouth; “I’ve just daub’d all my paper wh. syrup that I had to mix magnesia for Maria,” she wrote in a letter to her husband. “Don’t be uneasy, for if I think her dangerous I’ll send an Express to you.”⁵⁴ It was not at all uncommon for the mistress of the household to provide a diagnosis for their child’s ailment, and treat it accordingly.⁵⁵ In the absence of widespread medical professionalization, the burden for treating an ill family member fell solely upon the shoulders of the mother.⁵⁶ In this sense, the women of the latter portion of the eighteenth century held paramount responsibility in assuring the safety of their family. In numerous instances, female heads of the household were responsible for making the decision of whether to call in a medical professional.

In certain cases, women chose to perform duties related to nursing in a more public setting. For example, in a letter to Thomas Jefferson, Adams wrote of a cure for the sickness of Jefferson’s friend, Mr. Short: “I once found great benefit in the Disorder which he complains of by taking an oz. of Castile soap and a pint of Bristol Beer dividing it into three portions; and taking it three mornings, fasting.”⁵⁷ Adam’s willingness to provide a remedy by correspondence to Jefferson indicates utmost confidence in her medical abilities; and, as a result, reiterates the female role as a primary arbiter of non-professional treatment. Likewise, Morris also noted an instance in which she provided medical assistance in a decidedly public setting. Following a battle on June 14th, 1774, Morris was approached by a band of British soldiers and their wives. With no doctor in

⁵⁴ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 169.

⁵⁵ For further information on female home remedies of the eighteenth century, see James M. Volo and Dorothy Denneen Volo’s *Family Life in 17th- and 18th-Century America*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 215-16

⁵⁶ Rebecca J. Tannenbaum, *The Healer’s Calling: Women and Medicine in Early New England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002), 51.

⁵⁷ John Adams et al., *The Adams-Jefferson Letters* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg Va., 1959), 109.

town, they chose to come to her because “they were told that Mrs. M. was a skillful woman, and kept medicines to give to the poor.”⁵⁸ While Morris mentioned being afraid the soldiers were going to hurt her young son, she still chose to assist them; she wrote in her journal that several were “very ill with a fever—some said the camp, or putrid fever; they were broke out in blotches, and, on close examination, it appeared to be the itch fever. I treated them according to art, and they all got well.”⁵⁹ Despite the apprehension Morris felt at being in the company of British soldiers, her journal entry denotes both self-assurance and skill. For women, inhabiting the role of a medical professional allowed one to bridge the divide between behavior within the home and expectations of the public world. Women could, and did, transmit the knowledge of illness they acquired from private observation and intimate female correspondence to a larger realm, effectively and publicly asserting a positive self-image.

An exceptional wife, mother, and nurse, however, knew when to send for the doctor. Female writings denote that, when home remedies and treatment failed to take effect, women overwhelmingly deferred to the diagnosis of a medical professional. Morris, for example, noted several instances in which a doctor offered a decisive opinion on her or a child’s health, signifying her willingness to accept his authority, even in the face of her own medical prowess.⁶⁰ Equally demonstrative of women’s trust in their doctors was the fact that, in nearly all cases, women chose to adhere astutely to a doctor’s prescribed treatment. Burr, for example, wrote of an instance in which her baby daughter Sally was seriously ill; after sending for Doctor Farrand, she stated, “He seemed

⁵⁸ Margaret Morris, *Private Journal Kept During the Revolutionary War, Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution* (New York: New York Times, 1969), 31.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

concerned for the Child, and ordered a portion Physick, which I gave about 1 o’Clock.”⁶¹ Reed also described an excellent example of such, when writing of her sick father in 1766. While at first she thought he was taken with just a slight cold and fever, she wrote, “it now intermits, and he takes the bark every two hours. His physicians fear it is a slight apoplexy, or would at least turn to one if not timely prevented.”⁶² In the gravest of situations, then, women tended to place a tremendous amount of trust in the advice of their doctors. Indeed, as Morris, Burr, Reed, and many others demonstrate, the weight assigned to following a physician’s order was heavy enough to warrant explicit mention in both letters and diaries.⁶³

Discussion of inoculation, a subject of heavy consequence, permeated female correspondence in second half of the eighteenth century. Mary Beth Norton amply demonstrates the seriousness of the procedure in the Revolutionary Era, noting that the large volume of soldiers in urban areas led to an increase of epidemic disease, spread further by high army mobility. Thus, Norton writes, the Revolutionary War forced the issue of inoculation: “Waiting to take smallpox ‘in the natural way’ was to court death, yet no parents wanted to place their children knowingly into mortal danger or to risk their serious disfigurement.”⁶⁴ Jay’s internal struggle over whether to inoculate her children demonstrates the gravity of the decision; after sending for a doctor to discuss inoculation, Jay was taken aback by Dr. James’ suggestion that she instead ask for a man specializing in the procedure. She wrote to her husband, “I confess the hesitation of Dr. James has a

⁶¹ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 105.

⁶² Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 104.

⁶³ Of course, not all physicians were equally deserving of such unfaltering female trust; Jay cites a telling example of malpractice in Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 141.

⁶⁴ Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*, 201.

little stagger'd my resolution."⁶⁵ As Jay's first experience with inoculation indicates, the practice was by no means to be taken lightly; even trained professionals evoked diffidence in its administration.⁶⁶

Jay exhibits another interesting point relating to inoculation in the eighteenth century. Particularly in the case of an absent husband, the weighty choice—and consequences—of whether or not to inoculate one's children fell squarely upon the shoulders of the mother. For example, although Jay did author a letter to her husband asking for his opinion on the topic of inoculation, she made the ultimate choice to inoculate their children without his written consent. In a letter written soon after to her husband, Jay stated, "After I had written, upon more mature reflection, I concluded I already knew your sentiments sufficiently to Authorise my having the operation perform'd if Mr. Sutton should think it advisable."⁶⁷ Jay's decision to inoculate proved to be the correct one. Although eight days following the inoculation her youngest child began to display smallpox pustules and, soon after, went into serious convulsions, both children fully recovered shortly thereafter.⁶⁸ Jay and several other women of this study found themselves in a position of weighted importance within the family structure when it came to the subject of inoculation. Waiting for a husband's approval of such a

⁶⁵ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 152.

⁶⁶ Two women of this study in particular described in detail their apprehension over the experience of inoculation. Reed wrote of the process of inoculating her two young children in Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 173, while Murray referenced her personal experience of infection in Murray and Harris, *Selected Writings of Judith Sargent Murray*, 89. For discussion of the occasional ineffectiveness of the smallpox inoculation, see the example of Jay, whose daughter was inoculated four times without effect, in Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 207. Likewise, Adams provided discussion of a similar incident in which her children exhibited unusual behavior in contracting the disease in Adams and Cranch, *New Letters of Abigail Adams, 1788-1801*, 31.

⁶⁷ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 161.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

procedure would have been a waste of time she already did not possess; as a result, it becomes more than apparent that, in the case of inoculation, women exerted familial authority in a necessary—and significant—manner.

Death, like illness, served as an insidious aspect of daily life, and was certainly one with which all the women of this study had an intimate acquaintance. Women often demonstrated a persistent fixation with death. Between 1772 and 1776, Condict's journal, for instance, mentioned the death of family, friends, and acquaintances fifty-one times. Further demonstrating the centrality of death in the latter portion of the eighteenth century, Condict also described in detail three sermons relating to death in 1772 and 1773.⁶⁹ Likewise, the letters of several women in this study mentioned eighteenth-century death and funeral practices. Murray, who wrote in her travel journal in 1790 of the dilapidated nature of a cemetery in Stamford, described best the importance of providing for a loved one a proper burial: "I cannot witness without pain, any failures in a proper attention, to the remains of the deceased."⁷⁰ Those of the period found adherence to suitable funerary techniques to be an important part of the mourning process; therefore, a woman might chose to cling to tradition as a means by which to regain control in a world surrounded by illness, death, and, overall, the unknown.

Yet another important part of the normative behaviors related to death in the Revolutionary Era was that of remembrance. Ulrich has described a process by which parents of the eighteenth century might choose to rename children after siblings who had passed away; Bailey, for instance, named her daughter born in 1779 after her first child to

⁶⁹ Condict et al., *Jemima Condict, Her Book: Being a Transcript of the Diary of an Essex County Maid During the Revolutionary War*, 2-63.

⁷⁰ Murray, Smith, and Judith Sargent Murray Society., *From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th-Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray*, 86.

pass away, Sarah, who died in 1773.⁷¹ This, of course, was not simply a matter of indifference on the part of the parent—the death of a child, in fact, proves to be one of most emotional subjects discussed in the writings of the fifteen women in this study—but rather just one aspect of a “larger pattern of remembrance.” Ulrich observes that the practice might be said to represent “a now forgotten way of transcending death through progeny, of extending and enlarging each family’s past through a link to the living present.”⁷² Reed, too, provides fascinating insight into patterns of memorialization relating to departed family members and friends, writing a request to her brother for a locket with hair enclosed. “It is the hair of a young lady,” she wrote in her letter, “a very intimate friend of Mr. reed’s sister, who died last summer.”⁷³ Such behaviors served not only as outlets for grief, but as tools by which to reassert personal power over both sadness and unfamiliarity.

For many women, understandings of their role as nurse and comforter prompted them to offer their services to grieving family members in need. Soon after the sudden and unexpected loss of the wife of Frederick Jay, Jay’s brother-in-law, Jay wrote in a letter to her husband of her wish that Frederick would move in with her until spring. “It wd. make yr. absence seem more tolerable & I hoped conduce to his health as he could attend to his business then without the additional care of Domestic concerns,” she argued.⁷⁴ While Frederick declined the offer, instead hiring a domestic servant to take charge of his family, Jay’s proposal suggests that women took a vested interest in the

⁷¹ Abigail Abbot Bailey and Ann Taves, *Religion and Domestic Violence in Early New England: The Memoirs of Abigail Abbot Bailey, Religion in North America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), vii-x.

⁷² Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750*, 152.

⁷³ Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 176.

⁷⁴ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 200.

well-being of those personally affected by death. In some cases, as Jay further indicated, this pattern of behavior in which a family member would provide labor for those in mourning appears almost expected; following the death of her mother, Jay wrote in a letter to her sister Susan of her anticipation that she would take over the domestic tasks left behind in the household. “Remember my dr. Susan,” Jay wrote, “that it is your duty & will afford you great satisfaction to administer consolation to your declining father.”⁷⁵ Death, then, permitted women to take over activities—in this case, the administration of a surviving relative’s household—during the grieving process, even if in certain instances it proved to be a socially expected undertaking.

Analysis of female reactions to the death of those around them reveals an interesting behavioral pattern: that many of the women within this study felt it best not to disclose their mourning to others. Adams, writing of the loss of her mother, reflected upon her bereavement as though it was a type of reprehensible behavior; “I cannot overcome my too selfish sorrow,” she wrote. “At the same time, I know a patient submission is my duty. I will strive to obtain it, but the lenient hand of time alone can blunt the keen edge of sorrow.”⁷⁶ Jay, too, demonstrated the implementation of a strong outer exterior as a coping mechanism for grief, writing in a letter to her sister, “Let us not confine our view to the melancholy events we regret, but reflect with gratitude on the many blessings Providence has kindly continued to us.”⁷⁷ In many ways, this reoccurring theme of providence serves to better elucidate what may seem a peculiar female reaction to death; it is, in essence, the will of God that some die while others do not. As Conduct

⁷⁵ Ibid., 190.

⁷⁶ Adams, *Familiar Letters of John Adams and His Wife Abigail Adams During the Revolution*, 106.

⁷⁷ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 190.

further explicated in her journal, “Yet the Lord is still showing mercy To us, he has given us Health whilst others have sickness & is spareing our lives Whilst Others are taken away.”⁷⁸ Preconceptions of female selflessness played a role in quieting outward displays of grief.⁷⁹ However, contextualizing mourning within its religious framework further demonstrates that women were, in many ways, uncomfortable with externally questioning God’s design.

Of course, this is not to say that all women failed to acknowledge their grief in their writings. Wheatley, for instance, spoke of the death of her mistress as though she were her own mother, writing at length of her sadness. “I have lately met with a great trial in the death of my mistress,” she noted. “Let us imagine the loss of a Parent, Sister, or Brother the tenderness of all these were united in her,” Wheatley wrote, demonstrating that women appeared more comfortable expressing feelings of grief in private correspondence—whether in a personal journal or in an intimate female letter—rather than publicly expressing them.⁸⁰ Morris, who lost her husband in 1766, also demonstrated her difficulty coping with his death; “I thought of my own lonely situation, no husband to cheer with the voice of love my sinking spirits,” she wrote.⁸¹ For Morris, only her faith in God could give her the strength to withstand her grief: “A flood of friendly tears came to my relief, and I felt a humble confidence that He who had been

⁷⁸ Condict et al., *Jemima Condict, Her Book: Being a Transcript of the Diary of an Essex County Maid During the Revolutionary War*, 13-14.

⁷⁹ Linda Grant De Pauw further argues that perpetual familiarity with death prevented women from developing romanticized attitudes toward it. Likewise, “deaths were too frequent to permit elaborate mourning,” she writes, noting that declining birth and death rates at the beginning of the nineteenth century fostered amongst women more intricate patterns of mourning and internment. *Remember the Ladies: Women in America, 1750-1815*, 40.

⁸⁰ Robinson and Wheatley, *Phillis Wheatley and Her Writings*, 333.

⁸¹ Morris, *Private Journal Kept During the Revolutionary War*, 6.

with me in six troubles, would not forsake me now.”⁸² The fact that women chose to write their most explicit expressions of grief to other women, rather than husbands, evinces the important role played by intimate female relationships in the Revolutionary Era as a network of support. Though women sought to maintain a tough exterior publicly, they did find themselves able to articulate intense heartache over loss to female friends and family members in a way they simply could not with their husbands.

One of the most difficult deaths for a woman to transcend was that of her infant or child. Though Norton has argued that “A baby lost at birth or even in the first weeks of life did not have the emotional hold on its parents that an older sibling did,” the writings of these fifteen women indicate that in many cases early infant death proved just as painful as the death of an older child.⁸³ Murray, whose first child, Fitz, was stillborn, mourned his loss in letters to friends and family even a year following his death, writing to her aunt, Mary Turner Sargent, of her fears that she “forever bid adieu” to motherhood.⁸⁴ Murray noted an incident in her journal of being incredibly and painfully struck by a painting she viewed: a “portrait of Mrs Peale—the breathless Corse of a beautiful Infant, prepared for sepulchral rites, is stretched before her,” she wrote. Comparing the death of Mrs. Peale’s infant to that of her own, Murray furthered, “Thus wrapped about by icy death, was my darling babe, in the only view, with which I was favoured of that form, for which I endured unutterable pangs.”⁸⁵ While female letters—particularly those authored to husbands—demonstrate a written detachment between

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*, 88.

⁸⁴ Murray, Smith, and Judith Sargent Murray Society., *From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th-Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray*, 149.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 196.

mother and infant, journal entries and letters between women instead indicate the formation of an unintentional, but nonetheless ever-growing, bond with a newborn.

Jay, too, reflected upon her own personal pain at the death of her one-month-old daughter Susan, writing in a letter to her husband, “I sympathize with sister Watkins on the loss of her child; but should not, if untaught by an event that will be ever recent in my memory, have thought the task so difficult, to be reconcil’d to the death of an infant.”⁸⁶ Jay’s persistent and lasting grief over her baby’s death is even better illuminated in a letter written to her mother, in which she describes Susan’s unexpected passing: “Excuse my tears—you too mamma have wept on similar occasions, maternal tenderness causes them to flow & reason, tho’ it moderates distress, cannot intirely restrain our grief, nor do I think it should be wish’d.”⁸⁷ Regardless of the ways in which women expressed in writing their emotional state, be it calmly or poignantly filled with sentiment of grieving, it was exceedingly difficult for those of this study to cope with the death of a newborn child.

Just as women were to maintain an emotionless exterior at the death any other friend or family member, they often refrained from publicly—or, in some cases, even privately—demonstrating heartache over the passing of an infant. For Bailey, who lost a baby boy in 1789, one of a set of fraternal twins, there is a decisive attempt to demonstrate detachment from the situation; yet, one cannot help but glean from her writing the sense of grief she felt, witnessed particularly in her notation within her journal

⁸⁶ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 124.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

that “the distresses of the poor helpless babe were dreadful while he lived.”⁸⁸ Reed, who lost a child to smallpox, blamed herself for not taking “the necessary precaution to prevent that fatal disorder when it was in my power.” Yet, likewise indicating this convention against female grieving, she stated that she ought to “learn a lesson of humility;” she wrote in a letter to her husband, “The mercy of a kind Providence ought to make me ashamed of my unsubmissive and unresigned temper to my late loss.”⁸⁹ While Reed admitted that she ought not to externally question the outcome of God’s will, her letter clearly demonstrates that she considered the death of her child to be both unfair and unexpected.

Through patterns of behavior relating to illness and death, the fifteen women of this study found numerous ways by which to both reassert personal command over their lives and, simultaneously, to construct with each other personal bonds of sisterhood over the domestic experiences that nearly all women of the Revolutionary Era shared. Women devised several notable methods by which to maintain at least a measure of control during the unexpected hardships they faced in the eighteenth century; choosing, for instance, whether to discuss personal health or the condition of a child’s illness with others. Likewise, women affirmed their medical authority by making a clear diagnosis of and providing treatment for a sickened family member, calling a physician if deemed necessary, and, in special instances, in undertaking nursing activities in the public sphere. The decision of whether to inoculate oneself and one’s children, too, proved to belong primarily to women, particularly in the absence of the husband. Themes of domesticity, illness, and death so close entwined within the private female experience, therefore, aided

⁸⁸ Bailey and Taves, *Religion and Domestic Violence in Early New England: The Memoirs of Abigail Abbot Bailey*, 43.

⁸⁹ Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 291-94.

greatly in the development of female autonomy following the years of the American Revolution.

CHAPTER 4

“THE SISTER OF MY HEART”: HOMOSOCIAL FEMALE TIES OF INTIMACY IN THE REVOLUTIONARY ERA

“The diaries and correspondence of New England women,” writes historian Nancy Cott, “suggest that from the late eighteenth through the mid-nineteenth century they invented a newly self-conscious and idealized concept of female friendship.”¹ For women of the late-eighteenth century, sisterhood served as a fundamental and nearly inescapable aspect of the female role. Letter writing, in part, appears to have helped to cultivate homosocial female ties of intimacy. These were the close, personal bonds of friendship that developed between those who shared the cultural values of the era and the ever-familiar experiences of womanhood.

Women found ways to nurture intimate homosocial ties—and, as a result, to bridge the growing divide between their domestic role and public interests—by several notable means. The first section of this chapter focuses upon the female letter-writing network, analyzing the patterns of behavior employed by female letter writers that fostered friendship, acquainted women with social and political events, and provided them with a much needed leisure activity. Those of this study also strengthened bonds of sisterhood through the intimate friendships women depended so heavily upon for support and guidance. Engaging women in a continuous cycle of reciprocity, female friendship provided women with a protected avenue by which to discuss literature, politics, and religion. Lastly, women of the Revolutionary Era united through their surveillance of gender roles. Gossip was frequently employed as a means of social regulation. Not only

¹ Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" In New England, 1780-1835*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 160.

did engaging in gossip provide women with an exclusively female social organization to which they could belong, policing the “women’s sphere” allowed those of the fair sex to clearly define the core of one’s female role in relation to the women around them.

The Female Letter-Writing Network

In the period of the American Revolution, women created and strengthened bonds with one another through the medium of letter writing. Serving as a fundamental element in the female networks that stretched all across the eastern seaboard during the period, letter writing served several necessary functions. It was an avenue by which to seek advice, learn of public events, and keep apprised of the well-being of friends and family members, a method of female entertainment, and, perhaps most importantly, a means to better develop relationships with other women. Letters authored in the second half of the eighteenth century were highly stylized, typically—although not always—eloquently written, and polite. In fact, one historian has observed that while informal letters between friends “served to enhance friendship and family ties,” they had a secondary function as well: to present “a refined spirit in the act of revealing its sensibility, its vivacity, and its delicacy.”²

Communication by mail was not an activity pursued solely by women during the Revolutionary Era.³ While late seventeenth-century understandings of femininity discouraged women from writing and instead placed value solely upon male literacy in colonial America, the eighteenth century saw this ideology overwhelmingly defeated.

² Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 92.

³ As Konstantin Dierks has argued in his essay entitled “The Familiar Letter and Social Refinement in America, 1750-1800,” practices of letter writing broadened to include both middle to upper class men and women. He posits, “Once a social practice that reinforced traditional gender boundaries between male and female, letter writing was redefined to fortify emerging class boundaries between the middling sort—those who aspired to refinement—and the lower sort—those who were deemed vulgar.” David Barton and Nigel Hall, *Letter Writing as a Social Practice* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2000), 33.

The practice of letter writing as a means of correspondence between friends and family became equally valued by men and women during the period; men, in fact, were quite likely to engage in intimate communication with close friends, fostering amongst themselves an idealized and highly sentimental understanding of friendship in a manner notably similar to that of women. However, contrary to the lifelong behavioral patterns inherent within homosocial female ties of intimacy, sentimentalized male friendships rarely lasted beyond one's youth.⁴ Patterns of letter writing were highly comparable between both genders, though women's correspondence did take on its own separate purpose when employed within the intimate female letter-writing network: it served as a written link between a woman's accepted position within the home and the ever-inviting—though often distant—world of politics.

Letter writing played a pivotal role in keeping women closely acquainted with the events of the day, both within their circle of friends and in the more remote public realm. In many instances, letters between close friends served as a window into the daily lives and unique activities of women who resided hundreds of miles away. Sarah Livingston Jay, for instance, in a letter to her sister, wrote, "Thanks to my lovely sister for so frequently favoring us with intelligence, 'tis almost from you alone that we have any tidings of our friends, Mr. Jay seldom receiving any letters."⁵ For these women, letters were a significant—and, in some cases, sole—form of communication. Likewise, letter

⁴ Anne S. Lombard, *Making Manhood: Growing up Male in Colonial New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 94-96. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg argues, on the other hand, that close female friendships of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries "lasted with undiminished, indeed often increased, intensity throughout the women's lives." Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 73.

⁵ John Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2004), 105.

writing served as a safe and private forum by which to link the domestic realm inhabited by women and female observations of the public world.

Women communicated both by means of letters and mailed journals. Distance and the obvious failings of the mail system in the years surrounding the American Revolution had a tendency to prevent consistent contact between women. The British-controlled colonial post of the eighteenth century, though markedly improved from the informal practices of centuries prior, met with patriot resistance in the years leading up to the war; and the American postal service that replaced it during the Revolutionary Era was subject to repeated British raids and the seizure of personal correspondence.⁶ Several of the women within this study—including Sally Wister and Esther Edwards Burr—elected to instead author and mail lengthy journals rather than individual letters.⁷ In fact, in a letter to Mercy Otis Warren, Abigail Adams requested that she write her letters of the “journal kind”; she added, “By that mean I could participate in your amusements, in your pleasures, and in your sentiments which would greatly gratify me,

⁶ Several things further enabled the practice of letter writing: Benjamin Franklin’s acceptance of the postmastership in Philadelphia brought with it improved efficiency and regularity; the laying out of new post routes amongst the colonies and packet lines between America and Britain; and, in 1765, the passing of a law by Parliament to lower postage rates, thereby further increasing familiar correspondence. However, despite all this, the colonial post remained unreliable. Patriots saw the post office as a locus of British control within the colonies and, in the 1770s, developed the short-lived Constitutional Post and, later, an American postal system; although, significantly, much American mail was lost at the hands of the British during the Revolution. For more information, see Wayne Edison Fuller, *The American Mail; Enlarger of the Common Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 12-41; Wesley Everett Rich, *The History of the United States Post Office to the Year 1829* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924), 23-67; Carl H. Scheele, *A Short History of the Mail Service* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1970), 51-71; and Richard R. John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 25-63.

⁷ For example, Sally Wister wrote to her close friend Debby, “Tho I have not the least shadow of opportunity to send a letter if I do write I will keep a sort of journal of the time that may expire before I see thee, the perusal of it may some time hence give pleasure in a solitary hour to thee.” Sarah Wister and Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola, *The Journal and Occasional Writings of Sarah Wister* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 1987), 41.

and I should collect the best of inteligance.”⁸ Though a less frequent means of communication, journal letters offered to friends and family a far more detailed account of one’s daily life—and, as Adams pointed out, introduce a wider variety of interesting topics—than was accessible solely through letters.⁹

A close analysis of female patterns of communication in the Revolutionary Era indicates that, despite the fallibility of the postal system, letter writing constituted a central and necessary portion of domestic activity. Letter writing could be, without question, an unreliable means of maintaining contact; Jay wrote to a friend, “If my friends hear from me less than they wish, I hope they have the justice to conclude that my letters miscarry, which must be the case since numbers remain unanswered and unacknowledged.”¹⁰ Jay not only demonstrated a marked distrust of the postal service, but attempted to reprimand her friend discretely for a possible late reply. Yet, as evidenced by the persistent behavior of the women in this study, unpredictable patterns of letter delivery were not enough to dissuade writers from contacting their close female friends and family members; for literate women, letter writing in the eighteenth century was inextricably linked with expected patterns of behavior relating to friendship and family and served as an important means by which to cement bonds of female intimacy.

Women in the eighteenth century authored letters to each other for numerous reasons. Letters were a means by which to keep others thoroughly informed on the

⁸ L. H. Butterfield, Marc Friedlaender, and Richard Alan Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence, The Adams Papers. Series II* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), V. I: 301.

⁹ In fact, historians have pointed out that journals of the eighteenth century were often not intended exclusively for private edification but, to the contrary, were written as “semi-public documents” with the intent that they would be read by close friends or family members. Margo Culley, *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1764 to the Present* (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1985), 3.

¹⁰ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*.

significant—and seemingly insignificant—matters of daily life. Through the female letter-writing network, women sustained contact with each other and nurtured close friendships otherwise fractured by war and distance. Esther Reed’s relationship with her friend, Mrs. Cox, serves as an excellent demonstration of the ways in which the outwardly normal activities engaged in by those of the Revolutionary Era were subsumed by the changing political climate. “I wrote you a few weeks ago,” Reed announced, “since which I have not had a word from you; indeed, it adds not a little to the distresses of our days that we cannot mitigate the trouble of being separated from our friends, by a frequent and uninterrupted intercourse, but so it is, and we must submit.”¹¹ While women recognized their inability to maintain complete normalcy in all aspects of their lives during such economic and political turmoil, it comes as no surprise that many chose to cling to correspondence as a means by which to regain control and, perhaps, to impose upon abnormal events a sense of regularity.

It is of particular interest to note that women overwhelmingly sought to write about topics they deemed important to their readers; in fact, many went to great lengths in order to avoid boring a letter’s recipient.¹² The female communication network during the Revolutionary Era, then, served yet another notable purpose as a prominent provider of women’s entertainment. Letter writing, Bushman has argued, developed into a medium of artistic expression during the late colonial and early independence periods of American history. “Letters became performances,” Bushman writes, and as such also

¹¹ William B. Reed and Esther Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed, Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution. Series Iii* (New York: The New York Times, 1971), 283.

¹² Burr, ever conscious of the entertainment value of her letter journal, wrote at one point that she was “[Too] gloomy to write.” Esther Edwards Burr, Carol F. Karlsen, and Laurie Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 142.

became “a means of judging a person’s character and grace.”¹³ Breaking up the monotony of the daily domestic routine and offering solace from the constant fears of the changing political world, letter writing emerged as a much-needed leisure activity—or, as one letter writer noted, a “diversion”—for the female community.¹⁴ Burr, in her journal intended for Sarah Prince, denoted the pervasive sense in which the female author doubled simultaneously as entertainer, writing, “I did not write yesterday because I felt so dull that I knew that what I should write would not be worth reading.”¹⁵

The theme of letter writing as a form of entertainment permeated female correspondence during the period; interestingly, nearly all the women of this study expressed a desire to provide amusement to the recipients of their letters by discussing topics of interest rather than simply the commonplace characteristics of daily life. Mercy Otis Warren, for example, ended a letter to Abigail Adams by writing, “I will write again if anything offers worth Communicating.”¹⁶ Wister, in her journal, repeatedly articulated her intention to write only of things that “mattered.” In the entry, Wister lamented, “nothing worth relating occur’d to day.”¹⁷ This approach to letter writing within the female network indicates an emerging ideology among these female communicators of a hierarchy of letter topics of which public or political activities, discussions of books and sermons, and even female gossip overtook discussion of tasks relating to domesticity.

Nevertheless, letters written to and from women still contained numerous accounts of what were considered ordinary and mundane activities, particularly because

¹³ Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*, 90.

¹⁴ Esther Edwards Burr, Carol F. Karlsen, and Laurie Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 52.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁶ Butterfield, Friedlaender, and Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence*, V. III: 209.

¹⁷ Wister and Derounian-Stodola, *The Journal and Occasional Writings of Sarah Wister*, 57.

these so greatly comprised the bulk of daily female life during the Revolutionary Era. Wister, for example, announced in a letter to her close female friend her intention to write down all of her daily adventures, regardless of their social significance or entertainment value; “Oh Debby I have a thousand things to tell thee,” she wrote. “I shall give thee so droll an account of my adventures that thee will smile, no occasion of that sally methinks I hear thee say. For thee tells me every trifle.”¹⁸ Likewise, in spite of the apparent hierarchy of preferred communication topics, readers were more than appreciative to read and enjoy anything written to them. Burr’s journal sent to Sarah Prince more than indicated as much: “You ask me if I am not tired of these *dry* journals. I assure you I was never so *charmed* with Letters in my Life as since you have wrote in this method, so don’t call ‘em *dry* again.”¹⁹ For those participating in the female network of letter exchange, anything a friend chose to write about was, typically, deemed amusing enough. Moreover, the reassurance offered by those with whom letter writers shared the intimate workings of domestic life promoted inter-female bonding and reinforced the ideals of the community of sisterhood.

Maintaining frequent and consistent communication with one’s close friends and family held particular importance. Social instability and prevalent disease outbreaks were both outcomes of the American Revolution; as a result, a quick reply had the power to greatly ease the minds of those engaged in the process of letter writing. Writing to her sister, Abigail Adams demonstrated the ways in which rapid response provided comfort to loved ones during and following the years of the war. In 1790 she wrote, “I last Evening received Your Letter of 28th of Febry which relieved my mind from a great

¹⁸ Ibid., 47.

¹⁹ Burr, Karlson, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 49.

weight of anxiety. I do not think that I have been so long a period, without Letters from some, or other of my Friends since I first came to New York.”²⁰ As Adams revealed, the widespread political changes being implemented in America as the country developed into a new nation in many ways disrupted normative daily activities and left many women apprehensive about the well-being of friends and family. Likewise, rampant illness during the second half of the eighteenth century produced similar results upon accepted processes of letter writing, as demonstrated by Adams’ response to her sister written in another letter: “I was alarmed at not hearing from you, & feared that you were all sick.”²¹ Women understood the importance of formulating a dependable letter-writing bond in order to combat pervasive fear of death, illness, or displacement.

It comes as no surprise that many women considered letter writing an essential part of their day-to-day activities in the home. Because a quick response to one’s letter, along with being a gesture of politeness, served also as an affirmation of health and personal safety, many women continued to maintain consistent patterns of letter writing, even when busy or ill. Unfortunately, some found themselves unable—or, in certain dire circumstances, unwilling—to write to their close friends during times of illness. Jay demonstrated a sense of sadness at being unable to respond quickly to a letter from her sister; “I hope my dr. susan will believe,” she wrote, “that nothing but indisposition could have made me so long defer answering her kind letters.”²² For Jay and many other women like her, letter writing had become such a fundamental and inescapable part of female bonding in the period that they expressed sincere regret when unable to fulfill the

²⁰ Abigail Adams and Mary Smith Cranch, *New Letters of Abigail Adams, 1788-1801* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973), 40.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

²² Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 142.

expectations of friends and family members. As Adams so succinctly put it in a letter to her sister, Mary Smith Cranch, “I received your kind Letters and meant sooner to have replied to them, but many avocations have prevented me.”²³ Female relationships in the Revolutionary period were closely tied to the process of letter writing; while it was inevitable that unforeseen events or illness would halt a woman’s correspondence temporarily, by and large women went out of their way to maintain steady communication with those who mattered most.

The desire to adhere to popularly accepted standards of letter writing largely defined female communication practices in the latter portion of the eighteenth century. As becomes increasingly apparent when reading the journals and letters written by women, reciprocal expectations of letter writing compelled a letter’s receiver to respond as quickly as possible. In fact, numerous women of this study described in detail the trouble they went through to mail letters in a prompt manner. Wister, upon receiving a letter from her close friend Polly, noted in her journal that “I wrote to Polly by uncle Miles who waited upon Genl Washington next morn.”²⁴ Nancy Shippen, too, depicted the necessity of a swift reply, writing in her journal of her response to cousin Matilda’s letter: “In the afternoon I answer’d the letters I reciev’d yesterday from Virginia.”²⁵ Certainly, as Wister and Shippen both elucidate, women assigned to letter writing a high priority amidst daily activities, and in general sought to respond to a received letter within a few days of its arrival.

²³ Adams and Cranch, *New Letters of Abigail Adams, 1788-1801*, 22.

²⁴ Wister and Derounian-Stodola, *The Journal and Occasional Writings of Sarah Wister*, 50.

²⁵ Anne Home Shippen Livingston and Ethel Armes, *Nancy Shippen, Her Journal Book; the International Romance of a Young Lady of Fashion of Colonial Philadelphia with Letters to Her and About Her* (New York: B. Blom, 1968), 198.

A particularly pervasive theme within female writings of the late eighteenth century is that of reciprocity. Letter writing, by its very nature, required a sense of shared participation in the process and, as many of the fifteen women in this study indicated in their writing, expectations of mutual effort on the part of both the letter's sender and receiver resided at the core of the female communication network. Those who failed to live up to the ideological underpinnings of the letter writing process were often chastised for their misconduct; Jay's response to her sister Kitty more than demonstrates the reproach, albeit playful, showered upon those who, in the eyes of friends and family members, abused the system of communication. "It's paying you but an ill compliment my dear sister," Jay wrote, "to tell you that my intention is to scold you heartily for forgetting me."²⁶ At its core, then, eighteenth-century letter writing—and its resulting obligations of mutuality—served to more than ever closely link the female community, tying together women of varying distance and social background within a web of constant exchange.

From the principles of reciprocity inherent within female correspondence emerged the concept of "letter debt." The failure to respond to another's letter in a timely fashion constituted a violation of a code of letter-writing conduct. Such an occurrence was notable enough to deserve mention in female letters and diaries. Jay, for instance, recorded an example of such behavior, writing, "Sister Susan is many letters in debt to me for I've not received one from her of a later date than October."²⁷ Burr, in fact, found

²⁶ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 152.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 122. Adams, too, mentioned a similar instance in a letter to her sister, writing, "Louisa is worried that her Mother does not write to her. I really am [surprised] that she has not written a single line either to me or to her, because I wrote to her before I left home." Adams and Cranch, *New Letters of Abigail Adams, 1788-1801*, 23.

herself deeply embroiled in a discussion with her close friend Sarah Prince on the topic of letter debt; after noting that Prince had written three letters to a friend without receiving a single reply, Burr counseled, “I say I should not have been so good, but perhaps tis most prudent, but I think I would not send again least they think *you cant live without their smiles.*”²⁸ As Burr’s example so clearly demonstrates, the relationship between written correspondence and female friendship was so closely entwined that those who repeatedly infringed upon the conventions governing letter writing in the Revolutionary Era also found themselves trespassing beyond accepted behaviors of friendship and female networking.

Of course, this is not to say that women were unwilling to accept from friends and family an occasional late reply. In the end, hearing from a friend proved far more important than measuring the precise amount of time by which an expected reply was overdue. For close friends Warren and Adams, whose correspondence was on the whole punctual and of a symbiotic nature, the few instances of a late or forgotten reply were quickly forgiven. Warren wrote to Adams, “I must let my dear Friend Mrs. Adams know it gave me great pleasure to have but a Line or too from her after her very long silence.”²⁹ The opportunity to chastise those within one’s intimate homosocial network for a late or forgotten reply was rarely neglected, yet, in the end the pleasure of hearing from a close friend and knowing of their health and safety took precedence over reminders of proper letter-writing etiquette.

The female letter-writing network of the Revolutionary Era became an indispensable part of women’s everyday life. Within the reciprocal boundaries of inter-

²⁸ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 63.

²⁹ Butterfield, Friedlaender, and Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence*, V. I: 198.

female communication women received information on outside events, obtained a wealth of social advice, enhanced relationships with friends and family members, and even created an exciting source of female entertainment and—albeit often short-lived—domestic reprieve. Written correspondence served as a crucial aspect in the development of one’s intimate homosocial relationships; letter writing linked women together and, concurrently, drew them ever closer to the public world they often deemed so very distant.

Intimate Friendship

Female friendship played a vital role in uniting eighteenth-century women in their common experiences. A close friendship brought with it many significant expectations, including honesty, trust, and support; because many of the letters women wrote to each other were of a particularly sensitive nature, it was expected that a female friend or family member would not, under any circumstances, disclose their contents to others. Sisterhood held other necessary functions in the Revolutionary Era as well. Engaging women in the same manner as letter writing in a cycle of reciprocity, friendship linked women together and helped to foster intimate female homosocial connections. Through friendship, women gave and received guidance, entertained each other, and, perhaps most importantly, bridged the gap between the domestic world they daily inhabited and the public, political realm by discussing and analyzing philosophy, religion, and politics. Nancy Cott has argued that “from the late eighteenth through the mid-nineteenth century,” New England Women “invented a newly self-conscious and idealized concept of female friendship.”³⁰ Cott’s notion can be broadened to apply to areas outside just the New England region; as evidenced by the women of this study, elevated

³⁰ Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" In New England, 1780-1835*, 160.

conceptualizations of friendship and the central role played by female networks in a woman's daily experience extended throughout the northern colonies during the Revolutionary period.³¹

Homosocial ties of intimacy were essential to the female lifestyle in that they linked women closely together in a web of mutual communication, entertainment, and visits. Friendship, as numerous women of this study indicated, required shared effort on the part of both women to flourish. For Warren, her close relationship with Abigail Adams serves as a clear demonstration of the numerous ways reciprocal obligations allowed an already thriving friendship to blossom into an unbreakable bond. In one letter, Warren eloquently revealed an important point upon which friendship in the period was necessarily based: "I think Every Mark of trust and Confidence Reposed demands some instance of A Reciprocal Wish to oblige, for friendship is of too Delicate a Nature to suffer the least Neglect without pain."³² During a span of years in which political, economic, and social stability proved far from unvarying, female friendship—and the desire for openness and honesty that came with it—was one of the few steady aspects of a woman's life. Many women depended heavily upon the stability of a female support network as an avenue to voice concerns about relationships, illness, political uprising, and the many other travails so commonly faced in the latter portion of the eighteenth century. Simultaneously, women reinforced the symbiotic nature of their intimate

³¹ For more information on how female homosocial relationships defined the woman's sphere in both the eighteenth and nineteenth century, see Carrol Smith-Rosenberg's pioneering article "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," as published in Carrol Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 53-76.

³² Butterfield, Friedlaender, and Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence*, V. I: 187.

homosocial relationships by relying upon friends to keep lines of communication consistently open.

Friendship, like many other themes so central to female behavior, was governed by a distinct set of social conventions based largely upon ideals of complementary exchange. Female letters, journals, and memoirs, in fact, allude to the mutual expectations upon which proper female interaction was based. Jay, for example, indicated in a letter mailed to her husband that entertaining a friend in one's home during the Revolutionary period brought with it the assumption that the favor would, in a timely manner, be requited; detailing the shared nature of female socialization, Jay wrote of friend Abigail Adams, "She just now returned my visit, and offered to take a letter for you."³³ Interestingly, Jay's description of her visitation likewise indicates that it was not at all uncommon for close friends to call unannounced although, in numerous instances, women of the late eighteenth century did send out and receive invitations to female social gatherings in the home. Shippen provided in her journal exemplification of just such a request when invited to join a friend, Mrs. Craig, for dinner. Unable to attend, Shippen instead sent flowers as reciprocation of Mrs. Craig's summons, enclosing with them a letter that read, "The charming little stranger certainly deserves some recompense for paying us a visit so early in the season at the risk of its tender & delicate constitution. The greatest reward I think it can meet with is your permitting it to live & die in your bosom."³⁴ As Shippen's anecdote exhibits, female friendship was closely entwined with suppositions of politeness and mutuality. In Shippen's example, even a declined dinner

³³ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 205.

³⁴ Livingston and Armes, *Nancy Shippen, Her Journal Book; the International Romance of a Young Lady of Fashion of Colonial Philadelphia with Letters to Her and About Her*, 243.

invitation deserved the reciprocation of a gift enclosed with a friendly message, revealing an important detail about future expectations of friendship; Shippen's intent to keep her relationship intact speaks volumes about the shared nature of female intimate ties in the Revolutionary Era.

It should come as no surprise, then, that female friends also elected to send packages back and forth, location or political situation permitting. Burr and her friend Sarah Prince, for whom Burr's journal was written, partook in this activity on a regular basis, circulating to each other gifts and necessities ranging from books and candy to "a billet in confidence."³⁵ Writing, "Saturday Night about bed time I received a paquet from you I suppose by the superscription but no Letter to my great disappointment," Burr illuminates yet another interesting quality of female packets during the period: that, first of all, women tended to include letters—or, in this case, secret notes—within their gifts and, secondly, that in many instances, the writing of one friend to another proved more important than the presents they chose to send.³⁶

It is important to note, however, that in several instances described by the women of this study, gifts received from friends and family members were direly needed—and gratefully put to use. In the case of Morris, who spent several years directly caught up in the turmoil of the American Revolution, her family severely lacked certain perishable foods and items of winter clothing. Her loving and appreciative journal entry over the package she received from her sisters more than demonstrates the joy she felt at being given necessities—salt, molasses, rice, tea, coffee, sugar, and cloth—along with a letter. "How did our hearts and eyes overflow with love to them," she wrote, "and thanks to our

³⁵ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 101.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

Heavenly Father, for such seasonable supplies. May we never forget it.”³⁷ Morris’ gift helped to ensure the survival of her family in an extraordinarily difficult time, demonstrating the significant role women could play in the lives of their close female friends by means of gift giving.³⁸ Such behavior helped to further homosocial ties of female intimacy, linking women together in reciprocity and, oftentimes, in mutual need.

Behaviors attributed to female friendship, of course, extended beyond just that of reciprocity to serve several other necessary functions during and immediately following the Revolutionary War. A close friend could prove to be a much needed ray of light in a difficult or even gloomy existence. For Adams, who leaned often upon close friend Warren for support, the traditions of friendship more than deserved the laudatory attention she bestowed upon it in her letters. Writing of her friendship with Warren, Adams noted the effects of their correspondence, noting that Warren should have “charitably considered my lonely State, and Brightened the Gloomy hour with the Benign Rays of her Friendship dispenced through her elegant pen.”³⁹ Adams’ writing is illustrative of the ways in which letter writers of the period tended to create a highly sentimentalized understanding of their friendships, defining amongst themselves an idealized conceptualization of the network of sisterhood in place during the Revolutionary Era. Sisterhood was, unquestionably, perceived to be a vital part of female life, and in fact was often regarded as highly as the ideals of romantic love and

³⁷ Margaret Morris, *Private Journal Kept During the Revolutionary War, Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution* (New York: New York Times, 1969), 32.

³⁸ Jay was positioned on the giving end of a similar exchange with her sister Kitty in 1781. Following a request by her sister for several items, Jay sent a package of gifts that, unfortunately, was miscarried en route. Jay wrote to her sister, “I’m sorry the tea, gauze, ribbons, silk shoes &c. &c. that were sent from France did not arrive safe, but we wont despair.” Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 113.

³⁹ Butterfield, Friedlaender, and Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence*, V. III; 287.

marriage.⁴⁰ In fact, Cott argues that the linking of women with matters relating to emotion so prevalent in the eighteenth century, though intended to subordinate them beneath the status of men, “also implied that they would only find truly reciprocal interpersonal relationships only with other women.”⁴¹

Close friends, as demonstrated by the women of this study, shared with each other a level of candor in some cases surpassing that of their relationship with their husbands. Letters between female friends were an ideal means by which to lay bare one’s most honest feelings without fear of public recourse; in fact, it was not uncommon for letters to contain such sensitive material that women went so far as to assert that a letter be destroyed following its reading.⁴² As Burr so clearly elucidated of the nature of eighteenth century female relationships, “I think it is one of the great essentials of friendship [that] the parties tell one another their faults, and when they will [say] it and take it kindly it is one of the best evidences of true friendship.”⁴³ The best of friends were those who shared an open and trustworthy relationship.⁴⁴ Murray furthered the concept, writing in a letter to Mrs. Sargent, “I have been more explicit to you, than to any other person—and I will henceforth bid adieu to reserve—I will open the door of my

⁴⁰ Judith Sargent Murray shared an intimate relationship of letter writing with Maria Pilgrim, a London resident: “Yes my honored friend,” she wrote, “to my Maria I owe as much, as one mortal can to another, and her name and innate worth, will be ever engraven upon my heart.” Judith Sargent Murray and Sharon M. Harris, *Selected Writings of Judith Sargent Murray, Women Writers in English 1350-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 100.

⁴¹ Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" In New England, 1780-1835*, 168.

⁴² Burr, in her journal sent to Sarah Prince, mentioned a separate piece of correspondence containing secrets for Prince’s eyes alone, writing, “See an account of what Mrs Fickle said of and about you, in the private paquet to be burnt” in Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker. *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 74. Jay noted something similar in a letter to her sister in 1781, stating, “I shall commit this letter to the flames as I’ve done several before now.” Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 115.

⁴³ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 59.

⁴⁴ Numerous women of this study demonstrate the level of trust and honesty implicit within intimate homosocial female friendships. Burr wrote in her journal to Prince, “If I thought you would shew any of my Letters I should not write with half the freedom that I do.” Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 49.

heart, and my candid, my indulgent friend, entertaining the most secret avenue shall freely expatiate there.”⁴⁵ Murray’s sentiment indicates that, in certain instances, a woman’s closest friend was elevated beyond the status of even one’s husband; the “bonds of womanhood,” as Cott so accurately termed them, allowed women to unite under a sense of sincerity and shared experiences that they assumed men were simply unable to fully understand.

Women fulfilled numerous important responsibilities within the lives of their close female friends and family. A primary role undertaken by friends was that of supplying comfort in times of need. Shippen cited an excellent example in her journal of just such a friend’s behavior; during a particularly bad day during the slow dissolution of Shippen’s marriage, Maria stepped in to console and reassure her. Shippen wrote of the memory, “My dear friend Maria drank Tea with me,” indicating an important detail about the female network of friendship during the Revolutionary Era: that, for many women, just the sheer presence of a friend during a difficult time was enough to provide the encouragement to get them through.⁴⁶ For Adams, it was her tumultuous domestic life—her husband, greatly involved in the patriot cause, was often gone for extended periods of time. In August of 1775, four of her children became violently ill with dystentary during the same week—from which she desperately needed a reprieve.⁴⁷ Writing of the “many hours of pleasure in the society of my Friends,” Adams pointed to the important role friendship played in calming down her daily routine.⁴⁸ Female friendships served as a

⁴⁵ Judith Sargent Murray and Sharon M. Harris, *Selected Writings of Judith Sargent Murray, Women Writers in English 1350-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 98.

⁴⁶ Livingston and Armes, *Nancy Shippen, Her Journal Book; the International Romance of a Young Lady of Fashion of Colonial Philadelphia with Letters to Her and About Her*, 143.

⁴⁷ Butterfield, Friedlaender, and Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence*, V. I: 273-76.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, V. I: 275.

network of support for women in the second half of the eighteenth century, providing those who chose to participate with a reprieve—whether it be by simply drinking tea one-on-one or involving oneself in a larger social gathering—from the daily and mundane, or even crisis, activities within the household. Cott goes as far as to posit that, in late eighteenth-century New England, the diaries and letters of women “record extensive social life in which both sexes shared, but also suggest a pattern of reliance on female friendship for emotional expression and security.”⁴⁹

Women of the Revolutionary Era, though they did so in many instances unconsciously, implemented friendship as a means by which to bridge the gap between the domestic world they daily inhabited and the more distant public realm. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has suggested several interesting points relating to the growing link between networks of sisterhood and the larger political arena; while women did not have an ascribed position within the public sphere, their interactions with the community and participation in a female exchange network demonstrated their ability to create an important place for themselves beyond just that of the domestic. Ulrich argues that one can discern within eighteenth-century Hallowell “a complex web of social and economic exchange that engaged women beyond the household.”⁵⁰ This ever-expanding web of female exchange and friendship proved to be an integral part of daily life in Hallowell, just as it did for women as a whole through the north.

Networks of female friendship, then, served as a mediator between public and private life in the second half of the eighteenth century. Women mentioned on numerous occasions joining female friends and family members on trips and visits to locations

⁴⁹ Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" In New England, 1780-1835*, 173.

⁵⁰ Laurel Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 76.

outside of the home, thereby effectively relieving some of the pressure placed upon them by domestic expectations. Wister wrote of her female social life, noting that on “Sixthday Decmr. 12th, 1777 I run into aunts this morn to chat with the girls.”⁵¹ For Shippen, her friendships were a way to escape temporarily from the difficulty she faced with her estranged husband; she wrote, “Miss M. agreeable. We chatted—sung—walk’d in the Garden—the afternoon more agreeable than I expected.”⁵² Female relationships served as excellent sources of entertainment in the Revolutionary period—particularly in the absence of a suitor or husband—and proved significant enough to mention often in the letters and journals authored by women.⁵³

Women likewise transcended the divide between public and private in their discussion of subjects relating to politics, literature, philosophy, and religion. Without question, the women of this study were bound to each other and to their friends by emerging ideals of patriotism in the Revolutionary Era. While discussion of female political understanding will be discussed in the subsequent chapter, it is relevant to note that, during the period, political beliefs had a significant impact upon female friendships; Norton has argued that “political allegiance had come to be of major importance to American women was demonstrated by the large number of friendships broken by divergent beliefs.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ Wister and Derounian-Stodola, *The Journal and Occasional Writings of Sarah Wister*, 54.

⁵² Livingston and Armes, *Nancy Shippen, Her Journal Book; the International Romance of a Young Lady of Fashion of Colonial Philadelphia with Letters to Her and About Her*, 139.

⁵³ Writing of the women she deemed “her Ladies,” Adams observed that “We live upon terms of much Friendship & visit each other often. Whilst the Gentlemen are absent we propose seeing one another on terms of much sociability.” Adams and Cranch, *New Letters of Abigail Adams, 1788-1801*, 30. Wister also wrote of socializing with her friends, stating, “seventhday night a dull morn,” she writes. “In the afternoon Liddy Betsey RH and self went to one of our neighbors to eat strawberries.” Wister and Derounian-Stodola, *The Journal and Occasional Writings of Sarah Wister*, 66.

⁵⁴ Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*, 1st ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), 173.

Intimate female correspondence not surprisingly constituted a forum of discussion on topics ranging from philosophy to religion. Through their letters, women mutually exchanged discourse on literary subjects considered of the public sphere.⁵⁵ While female reading in the eighteenth century appeared on the surface to be an isolated, private activity of leisure, scholars have argued that women's reading, in fact, ought to be contextualized within its public and sociable framework. Heidi Brayman Hackel and Catherine E. Kelly further this concept, writing, "Women read aloud, and they not only talked about their reading; they talked in ways that revealed their immersion in a world of elevated print."⁵⁶ The women of this study proved highly appreciative of another's perspective on works of literature, buttressing their own intellectual comprehension with the collective ideas of those with whom they conversed and interacted. Hannah Adams, though often content to live in a solitary manner, mentioned on several occasions a group of close literary friends who served to provide her with much-needed intellectual stimulation. Adams, an author by trade, noted that her circle of friends was comprised primarily of poets. "Most of them wrote verses," she recalled, "which were read and admired by the whole little circle."⁵⁷ Engaged in a cycle of written reciprocity with her female acquaintances, Adams observed in her memoir, "Our mutual love of literature, want of fortune, and indifference to the society of those whose minds were wholly

⁵⁵ Historian Caroline Winterer points out in her essay entitled "The Female World of Classical Reading in Eighteenth-Century America" that the birth of salons and tea tables in the colonies in the mid-eighteenth century, modeled largely upon those of France, offered an entirely new avenue for women to enter into the realm of classical learning. Heidi Brayman Hackel and Catherine E. Kelly, *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800, Material Texts*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 107.

⁵⁶ Heidi Brayman Hackel and Catherine E. Kelly, *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800, Material Texts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 75.

⁵⁷ Hannah Adams and Hannah Farnham Sawyer Lee, *A Memoir of Miss Hannah Adams* (Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1832), 7.

uncultivated, served to cement a union between us.”⁵⁸ For these women, it was an affinity for literature—and intellectual pursuits in general—that both tied them together and linked them with the political realm.

Women also found themselves drawn into philosophical discussions with close friends and family members. As previously noted, female patterns of letter writing allowed women to discuss subjects about which they might not have felt comfortable conversing with their husbands. Shared backgrounds and a mutually cultivated sense of understanding among women allowed female friends to analyze and provide discourse on heavier philosophical topics without any genuine risk. It is important to point out, however, that women walked a tenuous line when discussing matters related to classical reading in the presence of men, careful not to overstep their bounds.⁵⁹ The symbiotic relationship of Warren and Adams clearly elucidates the nature of philosophical exchange; Adams, writing to Warren, cited an instance during which she mailed a volume of Moliere along with a critique and the request that Warren provide her “opinion of them.”⁶⁰ Warren replied soon after, writing that, though she disagreed with Adam’s view of Moliere, “Wherein I err I stand now and at all times ready to submit to the Correction of my Candid Friends.”⁶¹ Adams and Warren were not alone in written literary discussion, of course. Burr also engaged in lively debate of literature and poetry with friend Sarah Prince, writing in a letter of notable author Mary Joans’ *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse*, “Just now I meet with a paragraph in Miss Joans that has disgusted me

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Brayman Hackel and Kelly, *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, 107.

⁶⁰ Butterfield, Friedlaender, and Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence*, V. I: 89.

⁶¹ Ibid., 93.

[extremely], and beclouded all her wit and good sense.”⁶² The back and forth discussions between Adams and Warren and Burr and Sarah Prince are highly demonstrative of the intellectual reciprocity included within female letters of the period. Although women maintained modest understandings of their intellectual capabilities, one cannot deny that many women of the latter portion of the eighteenth century craved and sought out meaningful, intelligent discussion with friends.

Religion, too, proved to be a popular conversational topic amongst women of the years prior to, during, and immediately after the American Revolution. Unsurprisingly, the subject of religion served, for many women of this study, as a source of common ground. An important shared experience, religious matters arose as a topic of conversation in numerous letters authored by and to women in the eighteenth century. Hannah Adams went so far as to write in her memoir that she found herself drawn to two friends, Mrs. Dearborn and Mrs. Winthrop, “by their christian virtues.”⁶³ Religion, Cott argues, played an important role in shaping female relationships in New England during the Revolutionary period, forming amidst women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries a bond of “Christian sisterhood” of which even death promised not to separate them.⁶⁴ Religion was for countless women an integral part of daily life and, as a result, an excellent topic of conversation within female-oriented letters, as Ulrich has noted.⁶⁵

⁶² Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 64.

⁶³ Adams and Lee, *A Memoir of Miss Hannah Adams*, 41.

⁶⁴ Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" In New England, 1780-1835*, 179.

⁶⁵ As Ulrich writes, “For some women, affiliation with a church may have had more social than religious significance, but for others, religion provided a way of ordering the most basic experiences of human life.” Laurel Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 226.

Some women—Burr, for example—lamented the fact they could only write about religion with their closest friends or family members; Burr wrote to Sarah Prince of just such a conundrum, “There is *not one person that will talk freely to me on [religion] in this Town*—out of our own house—not *even Mrs Sargeant*.”⁶⁶ Abigail Adams, a woman of devout religious beliefs, found herself writing often to her sister about disappointments and successes within her spiritual life. Writing to her sister, Mary Cranch, that she could not bear going again to a church that failed to preach personal ideals similar to her own, Adams complained, “To go to meeting & set for an hour & half to hear a discourse the principals of which are so totally different from my own sentiments, that I cannot possibly believe them, is really doing penance.”⁶⁷ Bailey, too, sought to escape temporarily from the domestic realm in by attending religious services. Noting a shortage of nearby ministers, Bailey wrote in her journal, “I must say I had suffered a long famine of hearing the word, and of the ordinances of the gospel; there being no regular preacher settled in Landaff.”⁶⁸ Adams, Bailey, and many other women of this study indicate that the purposes of religion extended far beyond that of socialization, denoting one of many venues in which women found their private lives and the public world very closely intertwined in the Revolutionary Era.⁶⁹ Religious gatherings, by their very nature a social activity, allowed women to solidify bonds of friendship and form connections with the public community by giving them a voice in spiritual matters; in fact, it was not at all uncommon for the congregations of Revolutionary American

⁶⁶ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 112.

⁶⁷ Adams and Cranch, *New Letters of Abigail Adams, 1788-1801*, 27.

⁶⁸ Abigail Abbot Bailey and Ethan Smith, *Memoirs of Mrs. Abigail Bailey, Signal Lives* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 22.

⁶⁹ For further discussion of the development of sisterhood in religion, see Joan R. Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World: Women in Revolutionary America, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 109-131.

churches to be comprised overwhelmingly of female churchgoers.⁷⁰ Because women were often seated separately from men during church services, religious meetings fostered a sense of sisterhood amongst women and, as a result, aided in the development of homosocial female networks in the north during the period.⁷¹

Women of the Revolutionary Era found their intimate homosocial relationships to be largely defined by accepted patterns of friendship: reciprocity, expectations of honesty and trust, and the understanding that letters between close friends would provide a safe means by which to express one's opinion. The common experiences of womanhood allowed those of this study to build and, over time, effectively foster relationships with each other that unquestionably buttressed their position within a tumultuous social and political world. Perhaps most significantly, women employed sisterhood as a means by which to provide open discourse on subjects often considered to be male-dominated—philosophy, literature, and religion—and, by so doing, further closed the divide between the eighteenth-century “woman's sphere” and the realm of the public.

Reinforcing Gender Roles

The female network of correspondence during the Revolutionary Era served yet another functional purpose as a method by which to reinforce commonly held notions of gender roles. Through letters, women of the north found themselves able to privately and publicly ascribe their expectations of female behavior through a safe and protected medium. Reading the journals, letters, and memoirs of women of the period provides invaluable insight into the ways in which women of the late eighteenth century

⁷⁰ Baptist minister Ezra Stiles noted in the late-eighteenth century of a church dispute in Newport in which female church members comprised two thirds of the congregation. Listed in Mary Sumner Benson, *Women in Eighteenth-Century America* (New York: 1935), 262-63.

⁷¹ Mary Sumner Benson, *Women in Eighteenth-Century America; a Study of Opinion and Social Usage* (New York: 1935), 262.

understood their feminine role in relation to themselves and to others. As historian Kathleen M. Brown has noted, female public subculture in colonial Virginia was largely defined by gossip and discussion of sensibility. “In its juridical and community-defining roles,” she writes, “gossip was perhaps the closest thing to a female public.”⁷² Women of the North found themselves employing gossip within the intimate homosocial network of exchange in much the same way as did women of the South; for those of this study, the surveillance of female gender roles bridged the divisions between public and private and allowed women to openly participate in a public discourse on female identity and conventions. Furthermore, gossip functioned as a means by which to define one’s personal position within the whole of society for, in order to participate in the surveillance of female gender roles in the eighteenth century, one necessarily needed to belong to a group of close friends in which gossip circulated.⁷³

Writing to close female friends and family, women often used gossip as a method by which to express delight—or, equally as often, distaste—in the behavior they observed around them. The women of this study were quick to comment to their friends on issues relating to appropriate female behavior in the years surrounding the American Revolution. Female letters indicate that patriot women in the eighteenth century developed certain qualifications of suitable demeanor defined, by their own words, as “American,” during the period. In the years prior to the war, women’s references to gender roles were situated primarily in either distinct regions or urban centers. In a letter to Sarah Prince, Burr described the women she observed in Philadelphia, characterizing

⁷² Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 285.

⁷³ Edith B. Gelles, "Gossip: An Eighteenth-Century Case," *Journal of Social History* 22, no. 4 (Summer 1989): 667.

them as “very agreeable Ladies much like Boston Ladies, free and easy in their behavior and friendly.”⁷⁴ However, by 1780, conceptualizations of proper female conduct were analyzed less along the basis of regional qualifications and more on a national level. In a letter to Mary White Morris in 1782, Jay articulated this shift, noting, “there is not a perfect cordiality between the Ladies of Carolina & those of Philadelphia.” Jay, though, offered a critique, arguing that “a coolness does not at all accord with the character of the American Ladies.”⁷⁵ As Jay clearly served to demonstrate, one significant consequence of Revolution in terms of the female communication network was a movement—albeit subtle—away from regional distinctions of female deportment in favor of national ones, and, simultaneously, the development of a framework for the social character of proper American women.

Female communication in the latter portion of the eighteenth century proved to be an excellent forum by which to reinforce commonly held ideologies relating to the “women’s sphere.” First and foremost amongst female rites of passage was that of courtship and marriage; while, as the first chapter of this study posited, shifting understandings of the correlation between love and marriage permitted unmarried women to become slightly more commonplace during the period, normative behavior models in the eighteenth century continued to encourage women to enter into a marital relationship early on in their life. Unsurprisingly, married women attempted to pressure their single friends into matrimony as a means by which to reinforce proper gender divisions. Burr, in fact, wrote to her obstinately single friend, “Miss Abigail is nere marrying, as is usual

⁷⁴ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 120.

⁷⁵ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 125.

for all young people *but Miss Prince*.”⁷⁶ Indicating that Sarah Prince’s decision to remain unmarried was an unusual and controversial one, Burr adeptly demonstrated that many women in the Revolutionary Era had not yet grown accustomed to the concept of the voluntary *feme sole* and, as a result, were more than willing to implement correspondence as a tool by which to police the behavior of their friends and family members.

In many instances it was women, rather than male suitors, who proved most insistent upon a friend’s decision to marry. Condict noted in her journal of an occasion in which her female friends went so far as to plan a trip to West Branch for the purpose of finding her a husband; she wrote, “They told me there was young men Plenty there for me.”⁷⁷ Female exchange, unquestionably, played a significant role in determining the boundaries of acceptable female behavior as, in many instances, a woman’s sanction of behavior meant far more to another woman than a male’s ever would.

The policing of activities that served to define femininity in the late-eighteenth century extended far beyond just that of gossip and one-sided exchange, of course. Women often sought the approval of a friend or immediate family member in determining their course of action with a potential suitor. In some cases, women went to great pains to receive the blessing of those in her female network before moving forward in the courtship. Reed, for instance, needed the consent of her mother before she felt confident in her decision to marry Joseph Reed. In a letter to Joseph she wrote, “I immediately told mama, who is much pleased with it; you know it is what she always

⁷⁶ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 78.

⁷⁷ Jemima Condict et al., *Jemima Condict, Her Book: Being a Transcript of the Diary of an Essex County Maid During the Revolutionary War* (Newark, N.J.: The Carteret Book Club, 1930), 40.

said would be the thing, and she now approves of it exceedingly.”⁷⁸ Female approval through the medium of letter writing was a fundamental and necessary aspect of the exchange network of the Revolutionary Era; receiving the blessing of a close friend provided women like Reed with the confidence they needed to move forward in a decision that, for a woman living in the era of the early republic, could have serious consequences in the future.⁷⁹

The women in this study, both married and single, offered assessments in their letters and diaries on the nature of the marriages they observed around them. When writing about a relationship in a letter addressed to a close female friend, the evaluations a woman provided could be incredibly and brutally honest.⁸⁰ It is important to note, however, that a marital match which passed the scrutiny of the surrounding female community received glowing reviews and commendations. Murray, for instance, wrote of Bache’s marriage, “This lady appears to be happy in her matrimonial connexion—the countenance of Mr Bache is agreeable, its manly expression is tempered by a prepossessing sweetness, his figure is good, and his character is highly respectable.”⁸¹ Shippen, too, provided an appraisal of the marriage of her two friends. “Happy couple!” she wrote, “Surrounded by their beauteous Offspring & happy in their lives, they live a

⁷⁸ Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 56.

⁷⁹ Reed was not alone in seeking the blessing of friends and family members in favor of her marriage. Jay’s sister Susan likewise elicited the approval of her marriage to Judge John Cleve Symmes in 1794, which she happily received: “The Country to which you are going is I am informed a very delightful one & the gentleman that is to conduct you thither is (as I’ve heard) a man of sense & of amiable disposition. May my dr. Susan be happy!” Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay*, 219.

⁸⁰ Burr, writing to Sarah Prince, discusses the marriage of a Mr. and Mrs. Spencer; with obvious distaste for the behavior of Mr. Spencer, Burr notes that his wife “will find that it wont be so well always with her... but she must *Bake* as she has *Brewed*.” She adds as a caution to Prince, “I dont know [whether] I could forgive you if you should throw away your self on some *good-for-nothing Fellow*.” Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr*, 130.

⁸¹ Judith Sargent Murray, Bonnie Hurd Smith, and Judith Sargent Murray Society., *From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th-Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Judith Sargent Murray Society and Curious Traveller Press, 1998), 167.

life of uninterrupted bliss.”⁸² Shippen, though recently estranged from her abusive husband, still found enough joy in the successful relationship of her friends to expressively commend it in her journal.

If the quality of a marriage failed to meet the expectations of the surrounding female community, women were quick to employ letters and journals to voice their disagreement. In a journal sent to Sarah Prince, Burr noted several interesting tidbits of gossip relating to female behavior in marriage. Burr disapproved of a friend’s decision to marry and wondered, “How could Pamela forgive Mr B. all his Devilish conduct so as to consent to marry him... I have enough to see the Devil in the Man.”⁸³ Burr’s instant condemnation of the union of her friend and her friend’s new husband furthermore indicates that women of the Revolutionary Era felt comfortable with using letters as a way by which to express consent—or, in the case of Pamela and Mr. B, dissatisfaction—with the relationships they observed around them. Not long after, Burr mentioned another instance in which she observed what she deemed to be unacceptable behavior, although, in this instance, it was the wife, rather than the husband, who engaged herself in illicit practices: “Poor Doct Brunet is very ill, not likely to live—tis thought he is poisond by his Wentch.”⁸⁴ Burr’s journal entry indicates yet again that the female role as wife carried with it a distinct set of boundaries often under constant scrutiny by other women. Those who failed to meet the expectations of the female community were,

⁸² Livingston and Armes, *Nancy Shippen, Her Journal Book; the International Romance of a Young Lady of Fashion of Colonial Philadelphia with Letters to Her and About Her*, 141.

⁸³ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 98.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

oftentimes, the direct target of gossip passed through the network of correspondence in the north.⁸⁵

Condict, too, included within her letters an interesting example of supposed inappropriate female behavior. Discussing a newly married couple in Pleasantdale, New Jersey, Condict wrote, “they cut a fine figer for She is a Bounser Joan And he a little Cross Snipper Snapper snipe. they tell me he Cryd When he was maried at which I Dont a bit Wonder for I think twas anuf to make the poor fellow bellow if he had his wits about him, for I am shure She Can Beat him.”⁸⁶ Condict’s observations of this young couple she so obviously disliked provide intriguing insight into the women’s network of correspondence in the late eighteenth century and the role that it played in defining the socially appropriate behavior of a wife. For Condict, and many other women like her, gossip served to monitor proper expressions of femininity—and, oftentimes, to reinforce social hierarchies—by discussing in no uncertain terms women who overstepped the boundaries of their gender. The behavior of middle and upper-class women, then, was enforced primarily by fear of public social recourse.⁸⁷

Women also acted as the protectors of their friends and family members, notably of those deeply entangled within a loveless or abusive union. In fact, historian Joan Gundersen has noted that female communities often banded together to protect victims of

⁸⁵ Sharon Block’s *Rape and Sexual Power in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), provides a wealth of insight into the female surveillance of social behavior. Block notes that, in the case of familial sexual abuse, those who first discovered the wrongdoing were almost always women; Block writes, “Whether as part of community policing efforts or through happenstance, these witnesses gave molested daughters the possibility of legal redress without the daughters’ having to make the extraordinarily difficult decision to oppose their fathers in a public legal setting.” 102.

⁸⁶ Condict et al., *Jemima Condict, Her Book: Being a Transcript of the Diary of an Essex County Maid During the Revolutionary War*, 46-47.

⁸⁷ For further information on how the oral culture of the colonial period placed significance upon social order and reputation, see Kirsten Fischer *Suspect Relations: Sex, Race, and Resistance in Colonial North Carolina* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 134.

spousal abuse. “Neighbors sometimes intervened to restore peace within a family, shelter a wife, or use vigilante action against a husband,” she explains.⁸⁸ As evidenced repeatedly within female writings in the Revolutionary Era, an unhappy marriage was exceedingly difficult to dissolve, and could completely destroy the morale of an already discontented woman. Writing to a good friend, Burr hit upon just such an example; “Mr Burr says that *Mrs Robie* is greatly altered for the worse by Marrying. He says, that *Life* and *Pleasantry* that she used to carry in her countenance is almost gone.”⁸⁹ Yet another indication that women, as time progressed, expected more and more to enter into a marriage that would benefit, rather than harm, them, Burr’s anecdote served as a sober warning for those who read it to be cautious in their choice of a husband; marrying the wrong man could, as Burr effectively demonstrated, forever destroy a woman’s happiness and social standing.

In other examples, women sent advice or affirmation of a relationship decision. Following Shippen’s decision to separate herself from her abusive husband, a close friend used letter writing as a means by which to provide much-needed reassurance to Shippen. “She does all in her power to console me,” Shippen wrote of the exchange. “She tells me I ought to be cheerful, & happy, because I am rid of my tyrant husband.”⁹⁰ Shared experiences and understandings of the eighteenth-century female role allowed women to form close bonds with each other, dispensing trusted advice and written protection

⁸⁸ Joan R. Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World: Women in Revolutionary America, 1740-1790*, Rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 144.

⁸⁹ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 83.

⁹⁰ Livingston and Armes, *Nancy Shippen, Her Journal Book; the International Romance of a Young Lady of Fashion of Colonial Philadelphia with Letters to Her and About Her*, 162.

through the medium of letter writing, and at the same time to build up their confidence and embolden their actions.⁹¹

Women's surveillance of gender roles also extended to themes relating to motherhood. The female community employed gossip as a means by which to enforce maternal guidelines.⁹² For example, writing to her sister Mary Smith Cranch, Adams discussed Sister Shaw, a neighbor slightly older than the age considered to be normative for child bearing. "I was really surprizd to learn that Sister Shaw was likely to increase her Family," Adams wrote. "It really is a foolish Buisness to begin after so many years, a second crop."⁹³ Adams' words indicate that the female network of correspondence could be used to caution other women against an unsafe—or socially unacceptable—pregnancy. Furthermore, gossip was a common means by which to monitor female birth practices. In another letter written about her niece, Adams expressed her hopes that she would "not follow her cousins example, and be like always to have one, before the other is weaned."⁹⁴ While birth control practices in the late eighteenth century were typically nonexistent or, in the very least, inconsistent, women developed and wrote about an ideal reproductive schedule by which to have children.⁹⁵ Therefore, as Adams indicates in referring to Mrs. Norton, women were more than willing to gossip about others who had children according to a timeline that might be considered too soon after marriage or, in

⁹¹ The inter-female network of exchange also offered opinions on the dissolutions of marriages. Burr's example of Mrs. Banks, a woman who made the difficult decision to leave her husband, indicates that, in certain cases, separating from an abusive husband was condoned by the surrounding female community. Writing that Mrs. Banks "has this day actually left her husband and gone out of town... said she was ruened soul and body, and cryed as if her heart would break," Burr offered a description of the incident in which there was no cry of indiscretion on the part of Mrs. Banks by her female friends, neighbors, or family members. Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 110.

⁹² The concept of a "community-based system of enforcement" with which to police fornication outside of marriage and children born out of wedlock is discussed in Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*, 153-54.

⁹³ Adams and Cranch, *New Letters of Abigail Adams, 1788-1801*, 36 & 41.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁹⁵ Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 181

Sister Shaw's example, too late in life.⁹⁶ Not all female commentary on parenting proved to be negative, however. Burr provided in her journal an example of support in one's decision to become a parent. Writing of Mrs. Sergeant, who she noted often as being sickly or downtrodden, Burr added, "Mrs. Sergeant is very hearty and well and in good spirits, not so vapory as she used to be—This having Children does good sometimes."⁹⁷ For Mrs. Sargeant, having a child improved not only her disposition but, by Burr's own pen, her personal health.

The female surveillance of gender roles in the period of the American Revolution, then, emerged as a significant byproduct of intimate homosocial networks of exchange during the period. Gossip found its way into countless women's letters and journals; as Murray stated so eloquently in a letter to her good friend Mrs. Pilgrim in 1787, "Such is the depravity of human Nature, and so general the influence of envy, that we are much more sedulously employed, in collecting the blighting tale, with the malicious comments of slander, than in holding up to view the productions of rectitude."⁹⁸ These observations served to not only reinforce conventional gender roles—imploping women to behave as ladies, marry the right husband, give birth to children at the correct time, and participate properly in domestic activities—but simultaneously allowed northern women to both privately and, even more significantly, publicly discuss expectations of female conduct.

⁹⁶ As Richard W. Wertz and Dorothy C. Wertz point out in *Lying-In: A History of Childbirth in America* (New York: Free Press, 1977), pp. 1-25, the process of childbirth in the eighteenth century was inherently a social one; it comes as no surprise, then, that conventions surrounding pregnancy would remain a subject of public contention amongst women as well.

⁹⁷ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 141.

⁹⁸ Murray and Harris, *Selected Writings of Judith Sargent Murray*, 96.

CHAPTER 5

“NO SMALL SACRIFICE TO THE PUBLICK”: WOMEN AND POLITICS DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

The women of the Revolutionary Era were often understood by their male contemporaries as apolitical beings concerned only by domestic interests. Women, however, were greatly affected by the widespread political change of the Revolution; and while such changes were experienced by different women in widely divergent ways, female writings of the second half of the eighteenth century reflect an insightful and adept understanding of their shifting role within society. Those of this study often implemented domestic means—spinning, non-importation, and even the entertaining of Continental soldiers—as a foothold by which to gain entrance into the political realm. In fact, as the war progressed, such behavior grew to become highly politically charged, indicating that women developed a distinct sense of political awareness: and, concurrently, a great sense of pride in their patriot accomplishments.

Most commonly, women experienced political events within the context of the domestic world, through participation in clothing and tea boycotts, enduring the effects of quartering in their hometowns, and missing their absent husbands during the war. However, many of the fifteen women of this study also found themselves deeply involved within the public sphere as well, writing in letters and journals of specific political events, promoting the virtues of patriotism, and even openly voicing and discussing with others anti-British sentiment. During the years of the American Revolution, therefore, the female domestic world and the public realm of politics became ever more closely associated.

Politics and the Domestic World

Everyday female patterns of domestic behavior were swiftly altered by the changing political climate of the Revolutionary Era. Although women certainly experienced the war in different ways depending on their social status, religion, location, and race, there is no denying that nearly all women were affected in some way by the shifting political world around them. Often women chose to maintain a sense of normalcy in their activities within the home during the period, adhering as best they could to traditional activities as wife, mother, and domestic worker. While as a whole women did not question their domestic status, as the Revolution progressed, they seemed to find themselves often widening the boundaries of what was considered to be proper female activity. The ideology of nonimportation, the continuous presence and quartering of British soldiers, and separation from husbands at war each played a significant role in redefining female behavior, effectively blurring the lines between the private world of women and the male-dominated public. Within the domestic realm, many of the fifteen women of this study found themselves deeply—and often willingly—involved in matters relating to the American Revolution. As Mercy Otis Warren wrote of the effects of the war upon her as both a “woman and a mother, . . . no one has at stake a larger share of Domestic Felicity than myself.”¹

The female domestic role found itself drastically altered in the 1760s by the ideology of nonimportation. By the end of the Seven Years War, the colonies had evolved from a producer of raw materials to a primary market for British goods: tea, salt, and cloth comprised just a few of such resources. As an efficient means by which to

¹ L. H. Butterfield, Marc Friedlaender, and Richard Alan Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence, The Adams Papers. Series Ii* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), V. I: 139.

resist British mercantilistic policies, colonists on the eastern seaboard pushed for nonimportation following the passage of the Stamp Act in 1765, which levied a tax upon certain legal and personal documents, and the Townshend Acts of 1767, which taxed certain commodities in the colonies, including glass, lead, paper, paint, and tea.² Women gathered throughout the colonies to manufacture cloth, unified around a common goal: to increase the output of textiles in the colonies and end dependency on materials imported from Britain. In fact, 1,644 women attended spinning meetings—large and typically public gatherings of women to spin cloth and protest dependency on British materials—between the years of 1768 and 1770.³ Abigail Adams, who strongly advocated manufacturing from within the colonies, wrote in a letter to John Adams in 1774, vowing to “seek wool and flax and work willingly with my Hands.”⁴ Effectively demonstrating the permeation of the public world within what had previously been considered the private domain, women implemented female domestic categories—spinning cloth and clothing one’s family, for instance—as a means by which to gain entrance into the political realm. Spinning, a decidedly female-oriented activity, became politically and publicly charged during the Revolutionary Era as a symbol of devout patriotism and American pride.

Nonimportation played a pervasive role in the daily lives of women during the period. Unsurprisingly, several women of this study wrote in their letters and journals of their experiences with the manufacturing of homespun textiles. “For tho it was formerly

² Carol Berkin, *First Generations: Women in Colonial America*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 172-73.

³ Ronald Hoffman, Peter J. Albert, and United States Capitol Historical Society., *Women in the Age of the American Revolution, Perspectives on the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1989), 215.

⁴ Abigail Adams et al., *The Book of Abigail and John: Selected Letters of the Adams Family, 1762-1784* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 80.

the pride and ambition of American[s] to indulge in the fashions and Manufactures of Great Brittain,” Abigail Adams wrote in a letter to her sister Mary Smith Cranch, “now she threatens us with her chains we will scorn to wear her livery, and shall think ourselves more decently attired in the course and plain vestures of our own Manufactory than in all the gaudy trappings that adorn the slave.”⁵ Indicative of the infiltration of the public world into the domestically orientated realm of female everyday behavior, Adams’ willingness to support nonimportation strongly was shared equally with many of her female patriotic counterparts.

The women within this study demonstrated a devout commitment to home spun cloth during the years leading up to the American Revolution. Esther Reed, though residing in England at the time, observed in a letter to her American husband that “all the country people are spinning course linen.”⁶ Mercy Otis Warren, too, writing to Adams on March 1, 1777, noted, “I suppose when it is done we shall be very proud of Braintree Manufactures.” Warren, who, along with Adams, had just finished spinning between “94 and 98 weight” of wool, added in the letter that their example—and the example of others in the colonies who chose to spin their own cloth—ought to be remembered with pride. Of Adams, Warren added, “the Females of the united states, must in the Future Look up for the Example of [industry] and economy.”⁷ Women of the Revolutionary Era, as Warren’s statement indicates, placed a high level of importance upon their home

⁵ Butterfield, Friedlaender, and Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence*, V. I: 178.

⁶ William B. Reed and Esther Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed, Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution. Series Iii* (New York: The New York Times, 1971), 157.

⁷ Butterfield, Friedlaender, and Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence*, V. II: 167.

manufacturing and took great satisfaction in the politicization of their role.⁸ “As household manufacturers and as major consumers,” historian Carol Berkin has noted, “white women’s cooperation was vital to the success of any proposed boycott.”⁹ Women developed a great sense of pride in their domestic work as both patriots and family providers: and, as a result, significantly affected British profits as well. Even those women who chose to dress their family in home-spun fabric within the privacy of their own home appeared to take pleasure in the significance of their political actions.

Boycott on British goods, in conjunction with the general economic chaos of impending war, caused both currency inflation and a decline in available food products. The hoarding of certain commodities by merchants became a common theme of the Revolutionary Era. Adams denoted the need for certain staple items within the colonies—including coffee, sugar, and pepper—in a letter to her husband, writing “Every article here in the West India way is very scarce and dear.”¹⁰ Supply and demand allowed certain unscrupulous colonial merchants—and, on occasion, those simply trying to provide for their families amidst the skyrocketing costs to import and sell items like Bohea tea—to unfairly raise prices on those items that were in short supply.¹¹ Within this context, providing ones family with the proper provisions became all the more important.

⁸ Although no clear discussion of such emerged within the writings of these fifteen women, it was not at all uncommon for young ladies to gather and spin flax in a show of American economic autonomy. Historian Kathleen Bruce has argued that the 1769 Non-Importation Agreement succeeded solely based upon the prolific activities of women in decades past, who produced enough home-spun cloth to supply the colonies during the Revolution. In Williams, Selma R. *Demeter’s Daughters: The Women Who Founded America, 1587-1787* (New York: Atheneum), 226.

⁹ Berkin, *First Generations: Women in Colonial America*, 173.

¹⁰ Charles Francis Adams, *Familiar Letters of John Adams and His Wife Abigail Adams During the Revolution* (Cranbury, NJ: Scholars Bookshelf, 2006), 82.

¹¹ Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776* (New York: Reprinted by F. Ungar Publishing Co., 1968), 211-12.

Many of the women described in this study became intimately aware of the pervasive way in which the public world infiltrated the private realm of the wife and mother. Sarah Livingston Jay, for instance, spoke of rising prices, noting to her husband, “There is great plenty in the Country yet every thing is immensely high; new hay has been sold all summer at 5/6 & now is 6/. Oats at 3/3.”¹² Jay was not alone in developing such a clear awareness of the ways in which political turmoil affected the colonial economy. Other women corroborated a similar sentiment; while in certain regions, necessary food items remained available throughout the second half of the eighteenth century, women discovered they would have to pay dearly for them.¹³ Even after the war ended, the financial ramifications of the Revolution—in particular, currency inflation—remained. As Adams complained to her husband in a letter in 1778, “The miserable state of our currency adds to other difficulties, a hundred Dollors will not purchase what ten formerly would.”¹⁴ The ever increasing infiltration of political topics into the female domestic realm enabled those of this study to develop a sense of political consciousness and a knowledgeable understanding of matters related to economics.

Female management of the family economy during the second half of the eighteenth century was, without question, greatly affected by the American Revolution: and, just as importantly, women recognized and adapted to the need for change in the colonies. Prompted by the political climate around them, women chose to alter their

¹² John Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2004), 231.

¹³ Adams wrote on August 25, 1776, of the effects of the war on the family economy, noting, “English Goods of every kind are not purchasable, at least by me. They are extravagantly high, West India articles are very high all except Sugars.” Butterfield, Friedlaender, and Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence*, V. II: 107.

¹⁴ Butterfield, Friedlaender, and Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence*, V. III: 135.

purchasing and consumption behaviors in an attempt to maintain financial stability.¹⁵

Women not only practiced food conservation during the period and spun and sewed their own clothing, but often felt themselves responsible for the regulation of merchants hoarding essential goods.¹⁶

Women also found the daily patterns of their lives greatly altered by the presence of soldiers in their towns and homes. Opposition to the Quartering Act of 1765—which required the provisions of food, alcohol, and board for British soldiers in the colonies—grew to a head in 1766, and then again following the passage of the so-called “Intolerable Acts” of 1774, restrictions on the port of Boston and the Massachusetts’s colonial government issued in response to the Boston Tea Party.¹⁷ Men and women alike appeared incensed by the continuous demands of British soldiers upon the citizens of the colonies; As Adams so angrily expressed in a letter to Warren in 1775, British soldiers “have involved the Country in great difficulties by their obstinately persevering to tarry in Town.”¹⁸ For Adams and many other women during the period of the Revolutionary War, the continuous parade of British soldiers in urban regions proved enough frustration to draw heated comments in letters and journals.

Other patriot women—widow Margaret Morris, for example—encountered soldiers in a far more intimate and threatening way. Morris’ domestic felicity was

¹⁵ Historian Carol Berkin has noted that women substituted herbs and flowers for tea, developed a formula of walnut ash to preserve food in place of salt, and created new recipes for soap. Carol Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf : Distributed by Random House, 2005), 31.

¹⁶ Abigail Adams wrote of an episode in a letter to her husband in which a large group of women persecuted an “eminent, wealthy, stingy merchant” named Thomas Boylston for hoarding coffee. She described the incident, noting that after asking for his keys, the women “tipd up the cart and dischargd him, then opened the warehouse, hoisted out the coffee themselves, put it into the trucks and drove off.” Butterfield, Friedlaender, and Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence*, V. II: 295.

¹⁷ Benjamin L. Carp, *Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 12 & 88.

¹⁸ Butterfield, Friedlaender, and Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence*, V. I: 190.

severely shaken by the threat of enemy invasion in 1776, prompting her to write in her journal on December 12, “A number of men landed on our bank this morning, and told us it was their settled purpose to set fire to the town. I begged them not to set my house on fire.”¹⁹ Though Morris’ home and family were fortunately spared, the Coercive—or Intolerable—Acts enacted by the British crown in 1774 obligated Morris to continue interacting with soldiers throughout the next year, much to her obvious fear and dissatisfaction. “I got supper enough for twenty of them the first night of the alarm,” she wrote.²⁰ For Morris and countless other female providers of the Revolutionary Era, the crown’s expectations towards the treatment of British soldiers ate away at dwindling family resources. Because of rising food prices, merchant hoarding, and non-importation agreements, the acquisition of food grew increasingly difficult over the duration of the war. To feed and provide drink for British soldiers depleted supplies women knew were necessary to the survival of their families.

Interactions with soldiers, of course, were not just limited to those of the British side. As several women described, the influx of Continental soldiers on the eastern seaboard also proved to be an occasional nuisance. For Esther Burr, who spent a great deal of time entertaining political guests in her home, in-town militia training days levied a great burden upon her; she wrote in her journal, “Much hurried preparing for Company. This is our *grand* Training day, all the Militia in the County are coming into town... PM whiles I set waiting for the Governor to call me, and then I am to go up common to see

¹⁹ Margaret Morris, *Private Journal Kept During the Revolutionary War, Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution* (New York: New York Times, 1969), 11.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

‘em Train... All the Rabble rout in Town goes by here [so] that I am almost crazy.’²¹

Burr’s exclamation of irritation at the task of feeding the soldiers in town indicates, yet again, that for women of the Revolutionary Era, the lines between the political realm and domestic life were continuously blurred. Entertaining one’s guests in the home was decidedly a female household activity; to entertaining soldiers in the home, however, was to turn a domestic responsibility into a political one. Because Burr sought not only to provide for her family, but to give food and entertainment to those serving the patriot cause as well, she found herself extending familial obligations to encompass political obligations as well.

Burr, however, was not alone in terms of her interactions with patriot soldiers. Other women likewise remarked upon the ways in which the presence of the Continental army—or, more likely, individual town militias—affected their domestic activities during the war. Sally Wister, for example, provided an excellent illustration of one’s decision to offer food to a large mob of soldiers created an interruption of a woman’s daily routine. While Wister indicated in her journal her initial trepidation of the Philadelphia militia, she soon grew more comfortable with their presence: “after a while seeing the officers appear gentlemanly and the Soldiers civil I call’d reason to my aid my fears were in some measure dispell’d tho’ my teeth rattled and my hands shook like an aspin leaf.”²² Wister, like Burr, took upon herself the responsibility of feeding the rebel soldiers as part of her necessary patriotic duty. It is of particular importance to note, however, that women of the Revolutionary Era did so at great personal cost, as many were struggling during the

²¹ Esther Edwards Burr, Carol F. Karlsen, and Laurie Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 55.

²² Sarah Wister and Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola, *The Journal and Occasional Writings of Sarah Wister* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 1987), 41.

years of the war to properly provide for their families. As Morris noted of the quartering of Continental soldiers, “The inhabitants much straightened for bread to supply the soldiers and fire-wood to keep them warm. This seems to be only one of the many calamities of war.”²³ Providing food and shelter to Continental soldiers thus represented a strain on normal female daily activities. The fact that so many women did so with little or no complaint shows that women understood and accepted the politicization of their domestic role and utilized it as an avenue by which to participate in the patriot war effort.

Even if only in a temporary capacity, the American Revolution altered daily patterns of domestic behavior by uprooting husbands and lovers from the homes of their families. Missing one’s distant husband reemerged in the letters and accounts of a majority of the fifteen women of this study. As Adams indicated in a letter to John Adams in 1775, normative female behaviors were greatly affected by war and separation; “In the twelve years we have been married,” she wrote to him, “I believe we have not lived together more than six.”²⁴ While most women were not separated from their husbands for a duration of this length, the pain they felt at the distance proved equally palpable. Sarah Livingston Jay expressed just such emotions to her husband, confessing, “I find a deficiency, a vacancy, a something wanting since your absence that even surpasses what I expected.”²⁵ For Jay, the adaptations she made in the face of her distant husband proved to be even more difficult than she anticipated. Burr also wrote at length of the heartache and anxiety characteristic of separation. “It is very hard to let Mr Burr

²³ Morris, *Private Journal Kept During the Revolutionary War*, 22.

²⁴ Adams, *Familiar Letters of John Adams and His Wife Abigail Adams During the Revolution*, 114.

²⁵ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 144.

go,” she exclaimed in her journal, “but O! if he should never return again!”²⁶ Adams, Jay, Burr, and numerous other women of the Revolutionary Era recognized that an absent husband was yet another effect of war that held great repercussions within the domestic sphere.²⁷

A husband’s absence during such a tumultuous political and economic time wreaked havoc upon daily patterns of female behavior. In fact, an overwhelming majority of the women within this study drew strong comparison between their husbands’ distance and a state of widowhood. Such was the case for Sarah Hodgkins, whose husband was fighting with the Continental army during the Revolution. In a letter to her husband Joseph, Hodgkins articulated her apprehension over his personal safety, observing that “I must be contented to live a widow for the present but I hope I shant always live so.”²⁸ Gone for an extended period of time and participating in a war that claimed the lives of countless Continental soldiers and militiamen, Hodgkins’ husband was in real danger during the Revolutionary War. Within this context, Hodgkins’ response to her husband’s absence makes perfect sense. While Hodgkins hoped nothing would happen to her husband, the possibility that it might prompted her to compare his distance to widowhood as a coping mechanism; in fact, her behavior offers insight into the ways in which a woman might mentally prepare for the worst, should it occur.

²⁶ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 45.

²⁷ Sarah Hodgkins mentioned missing her husband, a soldier in the Revolution, on repeated occasions during the 1770s; she wrote, “Give regards to Capt Wade and tell him I have wanted his bed fellow pretty much these cold nights that we have had.” Herbert T. Wade and Robert A. Lively, *This Glorious Cause; the Adventures of Two Company Officers in Washington's Army* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958), 191. Likewise, Adams, in a letter to Warren, expressed again how much she missed her distant husband. She wrote, “I feel the absence of my better half, in this Day of Distress.” Butterfield, Friedlaender, and Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence*, V. I: 190.

²⁸ Wade and Lively, *This Glorious Cause; the Adventures of Two Company Officers in Washington's Army*, 208.

Hodgkins was not alone in comparing her husband's distance to a state of widowhood. Burr's husband, a minister and the founder of the College of New Jersey, often had to travel around New England; Burr noted in her diary prior to the Revolution, "I am a widdow again. Mr Burr sat out this Morn [early] for [Princeton]."²⁹ Although the reason for Aaron Burr's distance was religious in nature rather than political, one cannot deny that its fundamental effect upon Burr's lifestyle was strikingly similar. Such behavior indicates several notable things about female reactions to their distant husbands during the years of the war. Women often employed the comparison of widowhood as a means by which to lessen the separation anxiety they were experiencing; it would be far easier to compartmentalize the distance of their husbands than to dwell on the dangers of war. Likewise, when such comparisons were included in a letter written from wife to husband, they served as a manner by which to show one's husband the extent to which a woman loved and missed him.

The comparison between an absent husband and widowhood during the period serves yet another important purpose as a demonstration of the inextricable link between the domestic world and the political realm during the latter portion of the eighteenth century. Widows possessed a much greater degree of personal autonomy than did married women in terms of financial self-reliance and property ownership.³⁰ Certainly, as I have shown, many women of the Revolutionary Era also acquired increased domestic freedom as a result of the war. In their increasing self-sufficiency as deputy husbands during the period, women demonstrated that the correlation drawn between perceived

²⁹ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 87.

³⁰ Cornelia Hughes Dayton, *Women before the Bar: Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut, 1639-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 85-86, Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 146.

widowhood as the result of an absent husband and actual widowhood is particularly apt. In fact, Morris, a true widow, went so far as to compare her domestic status to that of friend Sarah Dillwynn: “I thought of my S. D., the beloved companion of my widowed state—her husband at the distance of some hundred miles from her—I thought of my own lonely situation, no husband to cheer with the voice of love my sinking spirits.”³¹ Interestingly, pervasive female expressions of sadness and loss toward their distant husbands likewise denotes that, while they were more than willing to take over duties typically ascribed as male and did, in fact, derive pleasure from their accomplishments, they hoped more than anything for their husbands’ return.

While many women recognized their sacrifice to the patriot cause and willingly supported it, letters indicate that women found themselves growing weary of the distance as time progressed. Female reactions to the absence of their husbands thus varied widely, ranging from sadness and loneliness to frustration, even prompting Jay to write of her “naughty husband who is too lazy to write to his little wife.”³² Following the appointment of Jay’s husband to England for his work on the Jay Treaty in 1794, she noted in a letter that “The Utmost exertion I can make is to be silent. Excuse me if I have not philosophy or patriotism to do more.”³³ Furthermore, she wrote of her patriotism, “it is become so thin that it will not much longer even serve to veil my disquiet at being so often obliged to be separated from a beloved husband.”³⁴ Losing the presence of one’s lover to political matters proved difficult for Jay who, as her statement demonstrates, held back her opinion on her husband’s distance at the result of great personal strain.

³¹ Morris, *Private Journal Kept During the Revolutionary War*, 5-6.

³² Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 56.

³³ *Ibid.*, 221.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 242.

Of course, Jay was not alone in such sentiments; Adams, too, in a letter to Warren, discussed the ways in which the public world impacted her relationship with her husband. “I find I am obliged to summons all my patriotism to feel willing to part with him again,” Adams stated. “You will readily believe me when I say that I make no small sacrifice to the publick.”³⁵ Adams’ letter clearly elucidates the toll paid by those of the Revolutionary Era in the loss—albeit often temporary—of companionship and domestic normalcy, although it is important to note that the extent to which women recognized their personal sacrifice and understood it to be significant to the patriot cause. As demonstrated by the close relationship between Adams and Warren, women also found themselves able to commiserate with each other over shared experiences, forming closer bonds with each other through the hardship of war.

Women’s writings reveal a clear willingness to part temporarily with their husbands and alter their domestic routine within the context of patriotism; those of this study accepted their personal sacrifice and, in many instances, took great pride in their participation in the war. As Warren clarified, “I have learned to think less of Absence then I used to do when I can be Assured of the safety of my Friend, more Especially when I Consider the situation of the Country and the Interest of posterity Calls for the utmost Exertions of Every Man of Ability, Integrity, and Virtue.”³⁶ Warren, however, was not alone in her discussion of personal sacrifice for the public good.³⁷ Reed wrote in

³⁵ Butterfield, Friedlaender, and Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence*, V. I: 276.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, V. I: 199.

³⁷ Jay also expounded upon the theme of personal sacrifice, writing in a letter to her husband, “True, I am an American, & it is from that consideration that I relinquish the pleasure of your company, when your attention to business which may prove of utility to the public weal renders a separation necessary.” Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 93. Adams, too, spoke of a similar ideology: “how hard is it to devest the Humane mind of all private ambition, and to sacrifice ourselves and all we possess to the publick Emolement.” Butterfield, Friedlaender, and Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence*, V. I: 255.

a letter to her brother in 1775, “You see every person willing to sacrifice his private interest in this glorious contest.”³⁸ As time progressed, these avenues of female participation—concerns within the household, the missing of one’s husband, and ideals of patriotism—served as important means by which women could gain entrance into the political realm without disregarding the daily demands of their household. As the public world and private expectations grew ever more entwined with each other, women implemented seemingly innocuous techniques as avenues by which to assert—often with great pride—their patriot participation.

Public Politics

There were few precedents for female political participation in the years leading up to the American Revolution. Unsurprisingly, then, female conceptualizations of women’s personal position within the eighteenth-century public world were often convoluted and inconsistent. Popularly held understandings of proper female behavior promoted an ideal of womanhood that was entirely separate from the world of politics; however, the American Revolution quickly and efficiently blurred the lines between the domestic and public realm for many women of the era. At this same time women seemed eager to live up to social expectations by downgrading their personal intelligence, often insisting in letters to other women—or, on occasion, men—that they knew little of political matters. In a letter to sisters Kitty and Susan in 1780, Sarah Jay asked, “What have I to do with politicks? Am I not myself a woman, & writing to Ladies?”³⁹ Even in

³⁸ Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 219.

³⁹ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 74.

the face of obvious political interest and knowledge of local and national events, women maintained a sense of false humility when referring to the public realm.⁴⁰

Warren exhibited just such characteristics of behavior when in a letter to Adams she referred to women as the “weak and timid sex[,] only the Echo of the other.”⁴¹ Yet, as this chapter demonstrates, in the case of both Jay and Warren—and many other women of this study—their insistence on political innocence was merely a pretense for their acumen. As historian Linda Kerber has noted, the lack of tradition regarding female participation in public forums may explain such description; “Perhaps,” she writes, “the formulaic, ritualized apologies with which they prefaced their political comments were their way of acknowledging that they were doing something unusual.”⁴² Yet, several distinct avenues of participation—specific female knowledge of Revolutionary Era political events, the promotion of patriot virtues, and the open voicing of anti-British sentiment—belied women’s pretense toward ignorance expressed in letters and journals they exchanged.

Eighteenth-century female letter writers adhered to similar patterns of behavior, whether discussing illness and death, religion, or, in this instance, politics. Early in the war period, women were on occasion reluctant to discuss public events openly, not wanting to burden female friends and family members with potential bad news. Esther Burr, in her journal sent to Sarah Prince, wrote of an afternoon visit during which the

⁴⁰ Other women echoed the sentiment of the woman as the “weaker sex”; Burr, for example, noted in her journal to Sarah Prince that “We hear a deal about the two Governments in Newengland going on an Expedition some where, but that is kept a secret, which is politick.” Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 86. Jay added in Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 30., in a letter sent to her husband, that “I assure it is not my power to write well in this room where there is such a collection of country-men talking politicks.”

⁴¹ Butterfield, Friedlaender, and Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence*, V. I: 92.

⁴² Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, 80.

Seven Years' War and the Indian problems at Stockbridge became a topic of discussion; she added of the incident, "I have avoided writing anything about My dear friends there because I should be too gloomy if I once begin."⁴³ Burr added not much later, "I wonder if it is in such a tumult at Boston as here. Everybody seem hurried. But will not bring the hurrys of the world into my Letters to you nither."⁴⁴ Certainly, Burr's example evokes the sense that women of the Revolutionary Era sought often to protect friends and family members from discussing subjects that could be considered painful or disconcerting; yet, particularly as the war progressed, women appeared increasingly willing to discuss political issues in their letters and journals.

Contrary to what some women may have professed on the surface, many of those of this study developed a strong interest in matters relating to the public realm; some, in fact, like Warren, drew great enjoyment and pride from her political discussions with Adams and others. Warren spoke of her husband's political participation in a letter to Adams, writing, "And though I feel a painful Concern for their safty I acknowledge I feel some kind of pride in being so Closely Connected with persons who dare to act so Noble a part."⁴⁵ Female awareness of political events and professed understanding of the importance of such events denotes that women had no problem discussing issues related to the public world with each other.

Increasingly over the period, women appear to have derived satisfaction in the growing link between private domesticity and the realm of politics. Women often employed domestically-oriented means—non-importation, non-consumption, or the boycott of tea, for instance—as a method by which to gain entrance into the often elusive

⁴³ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 59.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴⁵ Butterfield, Friedlaender, and Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence*, V. I: 199.

political world; as time progressed, methods of political participation once considered unfeminine became, for many women of this study, recurring behaviors. Throughout the duration of the American Revolution, Warren—who authored several significant works of patriotic propaganda and, in 1805, published her personal interpretation of the Revolution entitled *The Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*—became far from a passive observer in political matters.⁴⁶ Adams, too, engaged in political debate, writing to Warren in 1773, “You Madam are so sincere a Lover of your Country, and so Hearty a mourner in all her misfortunes that it will greatly aggravate your anxiety to hear how much she is now oppressed and insulted.”⁴⁷ Adams and Warren shared with each other an open—and particularly lively—discussion of politics that clearly illuminates deep female involvement and interest in public ideals.⁴⁸

Female patriots found themselves deeply engrossed within the daily events surrounding the Revolutionary Era. It was not at all uncommon for a literate woman to read circulated newspapers as a means by which to learn more about public activities. Demonstrating a clear interest in politics, several women of this study found their reading of the newspaper notable enough to mention in letters and journals. Adams, for instance, proclaimed in a letter to her husband in 1774, “All my intelligence is collected from the newspaper.”⁴⁹ Certainly, newspapers played a significant role in keeping women apprised of political events considered beyond their comprehension; however, as Jay denoted in a letter to her husband, women could—and often did—find themselves

⁴⁶ Edward Countryman, *The American Revolution*, Rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 188, Jeffrey H. Richards, *Mercy Otis Warren, Twayne's United States Authors Series* (New York & London: Twayne Publishers; Prentice Hall International, 1995), 127.

⁴⁷ Butterfield, Friedlaender, and Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence*, V. I: 88.

⁴⁸ Morris shared with Adams and Warren a profound excitement for political discussion, writing in her journal in 1777, “More news! Great news! Very great news!” Morris, *Private Journal Kept During the Revolutionary War*, 13.

⁴⁹ Adams, *Familiar Letters of John Adams and His Wife Abigail Adams During the Revolution*, 33.

emotionally invested in politics as they read them in the paper. Jay wrote, “I find by an American paper that the last Winter has been extremely severe there. How I pity our soldiers for the sufferings they must have sustain’d, & yet that pity is mingled with Admiration of the magnanimity with which they supported every difficulty.”⁵⁰ As Jay’s example proves, women not only read and connected emotionally with the political discussions within the newspaper, but often chose to spread the political information they read about to other women through their network of inter-female communication. Such behavior indicates a further level of political engagement than often recognized; women were not only cognizant of—and deeply interested by—national events of the late-eighteenth century, but found them significant enough to pass on to each other in letters and mailed journals.

The newspaper, of course, was not the only means by which women learned of political events. Women also actively sought out information from their husbands and friends, further demonstrating that their interest in the political sphere extended far beyond general expectations of acceptable female activity. Adams, who conversed with her husband at length on political matters prior to and during the war, wrote in 1773, “If you have any news in Town which the papers do not communicate, pray be so good as to write it. We have not heard one Word respecting the Tea at the Cape or else where.”⁵¹ Evincing a sense of deep involvement with public events, Adams’ statement implies that women developed a clear interest in the events around them: particularly in those that affected them so directly. As a result, women did not live fully sheltered lives within the

⁵⁰ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 79.

⁵¹ John Adams, Margaret A. Hogan, and C. James Taylor, *My Dearest Friend: Letters of Abigail and John Adams* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 28.

home. Adams, of course, was not alone in her sentiment; the diaries left behind by the women of this study contained frequent reference to conversation with friends and family over matters relating to politics.⁵² In Reed's case, it is immediately obvious that the Revolution had become an inextricable part of her everyday life. "We are surrounded with Boston men," she wrote to her husband, "who are so hot about these new regulations, that we have heard of little else for a long time."⁵³ Not only does Reed's statement indicate that she communicated with local men over political matters; it also denotes that Reed's familiarity with political discussion was so prevalent that it at times represented a burden to her.

It took time for the women of this study—just as it did for colonial society as a whole—to get used to the idea of Revolution. The years between 1763 and 1776 saw a slow but steady change in public sentiment in favor of a split from Britain. Fomented by several significant politicized pamphlets, including Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, patriots in the colonies rallied together against the missteps of the British crown.⁵⁴ Of course, men were not the sole audience for such pamphlets; women, too, often found themselves deeply engrossed in the political debates contained within circulating patriot documents. Demonstrating her deep investment in the patriot cause, Adams wrote to her husband in 1776 of her political reading: "I am charmed with the sentiments of 'Common

⁵² Burr mentioned on several occasions speaking with friends about issues related to the Seven Years' War. She wrote, We generally set and chat alittle after dinner about Mr Burr and you and the rest of Boston good friends, Northampton and Stockbridge which has no small share in our conversation as well as thoughts. Poor people! I fear they suffer a great deal! Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 56.

⁵³ Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 67.

⁵⁴ Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, published and distributed in January of 1776, played an enormous role in altering public sentiment against Britain. By Spring it had already sold more than 100,000 copies, making it the highest selling and most widely circulated political pamphlet of its time. Alfred F. Young, *Beyond the American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press), 12.

Sense,' and wonder how an honest heart, one who wishes the welfare of his country and the happiness of posterity, can hesitate one moment at adopting them."⁵⁵ Adams' statement suggests that many women read and personally adopted many of the ideals of patriotism put forth in the political pamphlets so popular during Revolutionary Era.

As a result of their engagement with political literature, women seemed to grow more confident in their political decisions. Moreover, their newly acquired knowledge seems to have provided a means by which to interpret the events transpiring around them. Sally Wister evidenced female resilience best in 1777, writing, "Tis amazing how we get reconcild to such things. Six months ago, the bare idea of being within ten aye twenty miles of a battle wou'd almost distracted me and now tho' two such large armies are within six miles of us[,] we can be cheerful and converse calmly of it."⁵⁶ Women's adaptation to war was certainly significant. As Wister illuminated, the progression of and familiarity with the war allowed women to grow comfortable with not only ideals of widespread political change, but personal and intimate knowledge of the political philosophies underpinning war as well.

Women demonstrated an unwavering belief in the ideals of the Revolution and voiced their beliefs openly in letters and journals. Burr, in her journal to Sarah Prince, expressed clearly articulated political beliefs in a medium free from social recourse. "I am very glad to see people in any measure awake with a concern about the dainger of being swallowed up by our popish enimies," she wrote of the Seven Years' War.⁵⁷ In this passage Burr demonstrated an emotional connection with the political events she discussed and a definite familiarity with popular sentiment against the influx of

⁵⁵ Adams, *Familiar Letters of John Adams and His Wife Abigail Adams During the Revolution*, 137.

⁵⁶ Wister and Derounian-Stodola, *The Journal and Occasional Writings of Sarah Wister*, 52.

⁵⁷ Burr, Karlsen, and Crumpacker, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, 77.

Catholicism during the time. Wister, too, articulated strong feelings of patriotism in her journal. Though a Quaker and pacifist, Wister found herself deeply attracted to the ideals of Revolution, writing of a 4th of July celebration that she, “found it difficult to suppress the tears that were ready to flow to ye memory of those who in struggling to procure that happiness for their country which we were then celebrating had fallen in the glorious attempt.”⁵⁸ Wister’s emotional connection to patriotism—and to the loss of those who fell during the war—was such that it nearly prompted her to cry: and it shows that, despite socially-accepted expectations of the eighteenth century, women developed a vested—albeit often emotionally-driven—interest in the Revolutionary War that they deemed significant enough to include in their daily writings.

For patriot women, the injustices of the British crown fostered a steadfast belief in the American cause. In fact, many described in their letters and journals the virtuous nature of the American cause. This enabled them to cast the events of the war in a moral light, effectively vilifying their British enemies. Warren made mention of just such an ideology in a letter to Adams, writing, “It is and Ever has been my poor Opinion that justice and Liberty will finally Gain a Compleat Victory over Tyrany”; and, of course, Warren was not alone in drawing such ethical comparisons.⁵⁹ Adams likewise noted the patriot cause as a virtuous one, writing, “As the season advances that must open the Campaign my solicitude increases though but certain I am that victory will one day give the Americans that liberty they have had the virtue to defend.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 136.

⁵⁹ Butterfield, Friedlaender, and Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence*, V. I: 181.

⁶⁰ Jay et al., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*, 102.

Statements of virtue went beyond just a division between right and wrong, however; other women, like Hodgkins, chose to cast American patriotism within a religious light. Hodgkins' letters to her husband during the war illustrate the sense in which the American cause was defined by patriots as a righteous cause: "If you should be called to Battle again may he be with you & cover your heads & Strenthen your hands & encorage your hearts and give you all that fortitude and resolution that is left for you and in his own time return you home in Safty."⁶¹ Comparing patriotism to virtue and an understanding that the American cause was supported by God allowed women to contextualize political events within themes with which they had become exceedingly familiar: morality, gentility, and religion. While women often employed domestically-oriented means as a gateway into political space, there is no denying that they developed a clear and devout sense of political consciousness that strayed far beyond the private realm.

During the Revolutionary Era, female letters and journals denote an obvious understanding of the progression of and events surrounding the war. In the years prior to Revolution, women noted feelings of uncertainty toward the future; Jemima Condict's journal entry in March of 1775, for instance, offers a sense of hesitation toward the potential conflict. "What we Can hear the Quarels are not like to be made up Without bloodshed," she wrote. "I have jest Now heard Say that All hopes of Conciliation Betwen Briten & her Colonies are at an end for Both the king & his Parliment have announced our Destruction. fleet and armies are Prepareing with utmost diligence for that

⁶¹ Wade and Lively, *This Glorious Cause; the Adventures of Two Company Officers in Washington's Army*, 220.

Purpose.”⁶² Conduct’s statement provides to the reader a strange dichotomy. While she obviously opposed negative British behavior and the idea of American “destruction,” her journal entry yet implied a hope that the growing divide between the two countries could find a peaceful resolve. She was not alone, however, in such sentiments. Adams, despite writing in a letter to Isaac Smith in 1771 of Britain’s “unnatural treatment” toward America, still mentioned a curiosity to visit the “Mother Country.”⁶³ Just as it did for Conduct and Adams, it took time for all colonists to mentally prepare for revolution.

Despite the fact that battle was not first and foremost on women’s minds in the years leading up to the war, there is no denying the fact that numerous women of this study voiced strong grievances against the British crown.⁶⁴ Popular sentiment against tea emerged repeatedly in letters and journals in the 1760s. Adams, not one to keep political judgments to herself, voiced a strong opinion against the landing of tea in Boston. She wrote to her husband, “The Tea that bainfull weed is arrived. Great and I hope Effectual opposition has been made to the landing of it.”⁶⁵ Reed, too, involved herself in the debate over tea following the passage of the Boston Port Act in 1774, which effectively closed the port of Boston until the cost of the tea destroyed in the Boston Tea Party was repaid.⁶⁶ “We are very impatient for the arrival of another ship, to have the particulars of the fate of Boston,” she noted. “The news of the removal of their Custom House is just

⁶² Jemima Conduct et al., *Jemima Conduct, Her Book: Being a Transcript of the Diary of an Essex County Maid During the Revolutionary War* (Newark, N.J.: The Carteret Book Club, 1930), 51.

⁶³ Adams et al., *The Book of Abigail and John: Selected Letters of the Adams Family, 1762-1784*, 50.

⁶⁴ Reed, for instance, wrote to her husband on February 7, 1766 of her feelings toward the Stamp Act passed in 1765. Though residing in London at the time, her dedication toward research into the act’s abolishment more than demonstrated her dislike of its passage: “We have many doubts about the repeal of the Stamp Act, as Lord Bute is determined to try all his weight against it.” Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 75.

⁶⁵ Butterfield, Friedlaender, and Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence*, V. I: 88.

⁶⁶ Benjamin Woods Labaree, *The Boston Tea Party*, Northeastern classics ed. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1979), 183-84.

received here, and distresses every thinking person.”⁶⁷ Even Conduct, who often took a pacifist stance toward war, noted the role played by tea in the conflict between Britain and the colonies, adding, “It seams we have troublesome times a Coming for there is great Disturbance a Broad in the earth & they say it is tea that caused it. So then if they will Quarel about such a trifling thing as that What must we expect But war[?]”⁶⁸ The drinking of tea, a notable part of female everyday activities, proved to be yet another point of entry to the national political debate of the Revolutionary Era. For many women, the subject of tea made what might otherwise have appeared as distant political philosophy an issue of personal relevance; whether or not one was clearly in favor of war, patriot women recognized and understood the significance of the events taking place in the 1760s. Likewise, they found such events significant enough to write about in letters and journals, furthermore solidifying the increasing—albeit temporary—unification between the domestic world and the political.

Patriot men and women alike found themselves engaged in a slow process of Americanization during the Revolutionary Era. Certainly, the ideals of the Revolution created a crisis in the minds of many women. Female patriots had participated in nonimportation and nonconsumption, taken over the economic dealings of their husbands, and, in certain cases, even fought in the war itself; as Adams put it best in a letter to her husband, “I have felt for my country and her sons. I have bled for them and with them.”⁶⁹ The Framers of the Constitution, however, failed to explicitly recognize

⁶⁷ Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 193.

⁶⁸ Conduct et al., *Jemima Conduct, Her Book: Being a Transcript of the Diary of an Essex County Maid During the Revolutionary War*, 36-37.

⁶⁹ Adams, *Familiar Letters of John Adams and His Wife Abigail Adams During the Revolution*, 74.

and solidify female political rights and status.⁷⁰ Despite this clear definition of the female civic role within American society, the writings of the women within this study more than demonstrate that women considered themselves true American citizens. As Adams wrote, “Nothing but the Blood of the Virtuous Citizens can repurchase the Rights of Nature, unjustly torn from us by the united arms of treachery and Violence.”⁷¹

Without question, Adams considered herself a citizen of the new nation, deserving of all natural rights bestowed upon her male counterparts. In much the same way, Reed added in a letter to her brother in 1775, “Remember we are struggling for our liberties and everything that is dear to us in life.”⁷² For the women of this study—and American women in general—the Revolution drew women into the political world in a way they had never been before. Through the larger process of Americanization, women found their domestic role effectively linked the ideals of the New Republic.

The fifteen women of this study are significant particularly in that they developed such devout interest in public matters and highly comparable patterns of patriot behavior without any previous female example upon which to base their actions. While women were socially expected to remain in the home, they chose to circumvent such expectations by developing a widespread female political consciousness in the north, proffered largely by the letters and mailed journals of the women’s exchange network. Through several important methods of participation—reading and discussing the national political events encompassed within northern newspapers, providing political encouragement to

⁷⁰ Historian Carol Berkin has argued that female citizenship was defined largely through a woman’s civic role as “guardians of and instructors in virtue.” Berkin, *First Generations*, 200. Linda Kerber adds, however, that the definition of women’s citizenship lay more specifically within their obligations to their husbands and the concept of coverture. Linda Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 13.

⁷¹ Butterfield, Friedlaender, and Ryerson, *Adams Family Correspondence*, V. I: 138.

⁷² Reed and Reed, *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed*, 236.

husbands, and promoting amongst women the spread of patriot virtues, for instance—
women bridged the gap between the private and public realms in a very concrete way:
and, as a result, took great pride in their patriot activities.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The concept of the eighteenth-century “woman’s sphere” has been, in recent years, a subject of contention amongst scholars of gender history. Women’s historians have begun to question two separate—though not necessarily competing—avenues of thinking in regards to the female role of the Revolutionary period: that male-dominated, patriarchal society turned women into victims; and that women of the era resided in a “golden age” of history during which farm labor and relaxed gender divisions elevated the female position in relation to women of other countries. As Mary Beth Norton has noted, “For over fifty years one theme has dominated historians’ thinking about women in early America: the notion that colonial women were better off than either their English contemporaries or their nineteenth-century descendents.”¹ While the theory of a “golden age” in colonial women’s history is certainly outdated, I have determined that women exhibited significant personal autonomy during the period. Derived largely from the social displacement and political upheaval of the American Revolution, women asserted domestic agency in making the decision to inoculate, choosing whether or not to entertain guests, and purchasing and decorating for the home. In the civic arena, women reaffirmed their political consciousness by diminishing personal wants and needs in favor of the patriot cause, engaging in governmental debates with husbands and close female friends, and reading and discussing the events of local newspapers.

While female conceptualizations of marriage and motherhood indicate that women continued to adhere to preconceived patriarchal notions of gender roles, the slow

¹ Mary Beth Norton, “The Evolution of White Women’s Experience in Early America,” *American Historical Review* 89 (June 1984): 593.

evolution of marriage ideology—including a growing focus upon love-based marriage, the movement away from parental control in one’s decision to marry, the emergence of discussion relating to family planning, and the implementation of Republican Motherhood—denotes that those of this study were beginning to see significant change even in the domestic sphere, the realm often considered by historians to be a haven of male domination. The political turmoil of the war enabled women to take on many household tasks typically associated with men, including the administration of the family economy and physical farm labor, both chores in which women took great pride during the period. The politicization of a woman’s domestic role further indicates the slow development of a civic awareness amidst women of the Revolutionary Era.

While the social laws governing female political discourse were at the time nearly nonexistent, women found themselves integrating patriot ideology into their intimate homosocial relationships by spurning friends and neighbors who maintained a loyalist stance or joining women’s associations catering to non-importation or non-consumption.² Therefore, the growth of female political consciousness in the household through spinning or the drinking of tea, within the female letter-writing network, and in patriot participation itself, demonstrates that understandings of the domestic world as an isolated and distinctly separate sphere from that of the public prove to be largely inaccurate. Rather, the political climate of the Revolutionary Era effectively blurred the lines between the two realms, allowing for women transcend socially-defined boundaries through political action, implement the language of patriotism in their domestic tasks and motherhood, and to question the impact of republicanism upon the ideology of coverture.

² Joan R. Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World: Women in Revolutionary America, 1740-1790*, Rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 176.

In fact, I would argue that a proper understanding of women's lives during the period requires first that historians do away with the conceptual framework of "separate spheres" and instead understand the female experience as a progression—a series of steps from marital and domestic freedom to political consciousness—toward the feminist ideology of the early-nineteenth century.

These fifteen women—chosen because of their patriotism, regional location, literacy, and the accessibility of their writings—may appear to be, on the surface, an anomaly. All were literate, most derived from the mid to upper echelons of northern society and two, Abigail Adams and Sarah Livingston Jay, were even married to statesmen, making them potentially unrepresentative. However, regardless of the specificity of this study, these women offer an indication of evolving roles of Revolutionary Era women in the North as a whole. Historians note widespread female participation in tea boycotts, non-importation, merchant enforcement, and the spinning activity of those who referred to themselves as the "daughters of liberty," all indicative of the fact that the politicization of the female domestic role proved to be a widespread phenomenon.³ Furthermore, women throughout the North demonstrated their political passion by not only internalizing patriotic sentiments, but by finding them important enough to instill in their husbands and children. Through the ideology of Republican Motherhood, women created their own definition of female citizenship by formulating within the family their role as the supplier of civic virtue and patriot principles.

³ Linda Grant De Pauw & McCurdy, Michael, *Founding Mothers: Women in America in the Revolutionary Era* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 153, Ronald Hoffman, Peter J. Albert, and United States Capitol Historical Society., *Women in the Age of the American Revolution, Perspectives on the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1989), 215, Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 38, Selma R. Williams, *Demeter's Daughters: The Women Who Founded America, 1587-1787*, 1st ed. (New York: Atheneum, 1976), 227.

By utilizing a microhistorical approach, this study demonstrates particular relevance in that it provides a clearer and more personal understanding of the ways in which individual women in the North responded to and wrote about the interactions of the domestic and public worlds. It offers illumination into the intimate relationships of Revolutionary American women as wives, mothers, sisters, and close friends that a broader focus would be unable to so intimately supply. Analyzing the eighteenth-century “woman’s sphere” through a more narrow lens, then, affords important conclusions about shifting status—in marriage, motherhood, and domestic tasks, and as evidenced by patterns of letter writing, surveillance of gender roles, and political participation—without oversimplifying categories of class, race, or location and the ways in which they shaped a woman’s lifestyle or mentality. Though one cannot assume widespread generalizations about everyday female life during the period, examination of these particular women indicates trends that, while not universal, proved highly applicable to the female experience of the time.

This study opens the door for a wealth of future gender research pertaining to the years surrounding the American Revolution. Contrary to the popular understanding that scholarship on early American and Revolutionary history has been stretched to its utmost limit, such research on eighteenth-century women proves that both of these fields still have a great deal to offer. The stories of countless colonial women remain unpublished, and their diaries and letters have as of yet not been read without agenda or preconception. To broaden the scope of this study by including a larger sample of women—or to assess comparatively the writings of both patriot and loyalist women—would offer even further

clarification on a subject that, without question, still deserves significant historical attention.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Source Material

- Adams, Abigail, John Adams, L. H. Butterfield, Marc Friedlaender, and Mary-Jo Kline. *The Book of Abigail and John: Selected Letters of the Adams Family, 1762-1784*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975.
- Adams, Abigail, and Mary Smith Cranch. *New Letters of Abigail Adams, 1788-1801*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973.
- Adams, Charles Francis. *Familiar Letters of John Adams and His Wife Abigail Adams During the Revolution*. Cranbury, NJ: Scholars Bookshelf, 2006.
- Adams, Hannah, and Hannah Farnham Sawyer Lee. *A Memoir of Miss Hannah Adams*. Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1832.
- Adams, John, Abigail Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Lester Jesse Cappon. *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*. Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg Va., 1959.
- Adams, John, Margaret A. Hogan, and C. James Taylor. *My Dearest Friend: Letters of Abigail and John Adams*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Bailey, Abigail Abbot, and Ethan Smith. *Memoirs of Mrs. Abigail Bailey, Signal Lives*. New York: Arno Press, 1980.
- Bailey, Abigail Abbot, and Ann Taves. *Religion and Domestic Violence in Early New England: The Memoirs of Abigail Abbot Bailey, Religion in North America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.
- Burr, Esther Edwards, Carol F. Karlsen, and Laurie Crumpacker. *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.
- Butterfield, L. H., Marc Friedlaender, and Richard Alan Ryerson. *Adams Family Correspondence, The Adams Papers. Series II*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963.
- Condict, Jemima, Wilbur Macey Stone, Carteret Book Club., and New Jersey Historical Society. *Jemima Condict, Her Book: Being a Transcript of the Diary of an Essex County Maid During the Revolutionary War*. Newark, N.J.: The Carteret Book Club, 1930.

- Franklin, Benjamin. *Benjamin Franklin and Catharine Ray Greene, Their Correspondence, 1755-1790, Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society V. 26*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1949.
- Jay, John, Landa M. Freeman, Sarah Livingston Jay, Louise V. North, and Janet M. Wedge. *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2004.
- Livingston, Anne Home Shippen, and Ethel Armes. *Nancy Shippen, Her Journal Book; the International Romance of a Young Lady of Fashion of Colonial Philadelphia with Letters to Her and About Her*. New York: B. Blom, 1968.
- Morris, Margaret. *Private Journal Kept During the Revolutionary War, Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution*. New York: New York Times, 1969.
- Murray, Judith Sargent, and John Adams. *The Gleaner: A Miscellaneous Production. In Three Volumes*. Printed at Boston: by I. Thomas and E.T. Andrews, Faust's Statue, no. 45, Newbury-Street. 1798. Microform.
- Murray, Judith Sargent, and Sharon M. Harris. *Selected Writings of Judith Sargent Murray, Women Writers in English 1350-1850*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Murray, Judith Sargent, Bonnie Hurd Smith, and Judith Sargent Murray Society. *From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th-Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray*. 1st ed. Cambridge: Judith Sargent Murray Society and Curious Traveller Press, 1998.
- Reed, William B., and Esther Reed. *The Life of Esther De Berdt, [Afterwards] Esther Reed, Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution. Series III*. New York: The New York Times, 1971.
- Robinson, William Henry, and Phillis Wheatley. *Phillis Wheatley and Her Writings, Critical Studies on Black Life and Culture; V. 12*. New York: Garland, 1984.
- Wade, Herbert T., and Robert A. Lively. *This Glorious Cause; the Adventures of Two Company Officers in Washington's Army*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958.
- Warren, Mercy Otis. *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution. Interspersed with Biographical, Political and Moral Observations*. Boston: Printed by Manning and Loring, For E. Larkin, No. 47, 1805.

Wister, Sarah, and Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola. *The Journal and Occasional Writings of Sarah Wister*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 1987.

Secondary Source Material

Barton, David, and Nigel Hall. *Letter Writing as a Social Practice, Studies in Written Language and Literacy, V. 9*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2000.

Benson, Mary Sumner. *Women in Eighteenth-Century America; a Study of Opinion and Social Usage*. New York, 1935.

Berkin, Carol. *First Generations: Women in Colonial America*. 1st ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 1996.

———. *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence*. 1st ed. New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 2005.

Bloch, Ruth H. *Gender and Morality in Anglo-American Culture, 1650-1800*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

Bohrer, Melissa Lukeman. *Glory, Passion, and Principle: The Story of Eight Remarkable Women at the Core of the American Revolution*. New York: Atria Books, 2003.

Brayman Hackel, Heidi, and Catherine E. Kelly. *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800, Material Texts*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.

Brown, Kathleen M. *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*. Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Buel, Joy Day, and Richard Buel. *The Way of Duty: A Woman and Her Family in Revolutionary America*. New York: Norton, 1984.

Bushman, Richard L. *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*. 1st Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.

Carp, Benjamin L. *Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Chambers-Schiller, Lee Virginia. *Liberty, a Better Husband: Single Women in America: The Generations of 1780-1840*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.

- Cott, Nancy F. *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" In New England, 1780-1835*. 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.
- . "Divorce and the Changing Status of Women in Eighteenth Century Massachusetts." *William and Mary Quarterly* 33 (Oct 1976): 586-614.
- . *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Countryman, Edward. *The American Revolution*. Rev. ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 2003.
- Culley, Margo. *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1764 to the Present*. New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1985.
- Daniels, Christine, and Michael V. Kennedy. *Over the Threshold: Intimate Violence in Early America*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Dayton, Cornelia Hughes. *Women before the Bar: Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut, 1639-1789*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.
- De Pauw, Linda Grant & McCurdy, Michael. *Founding Mothers: Women in America in the Revolutionary Era*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975.
- De Pauw, Linda Grant, Conover Hunt, and Miriam Schneir. *Remember the Ladies: Women in America, 1750-1815*. New York: Viking Press, 1976.
- Dye, Nancy Schrom. "History of Childbirth in America." *Signs* 6, no. 1 (Autumn, 1980): 97-108.
- Eldridge, Larry D. *Women and Freedom in Early America*. New York: New York University Press, 1997.
- Ellet, E. F., Carrie Chapman Catt, and National American Woman Suffrage Association Collection (Library of Congress). *The Women of the American Revolution*. 2 vols. New York: Baker and Scribner, 1848.
- Fenn, Elizabeth A. *Pox Americana: The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-82*. 1st ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 2001.
- Fuller, Wayne Edison. *The American Mail; Enlarger of the Common Life, The Chicago History of American Civilization*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.
- Garraty, John A., Mark C. Carnes, and American Council of Learned Societies. *American National Biography*. 24 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

- Gelles, Edith B. "Gossip: An Eighteenth-Century Case." *Journal of Social History* 22, no. 4 (Summer 1989): 667-83.
- Greene, Jack P., Richard L. Bushman, Michael G. Kammen, and Richard M. Jellison. *Society, Freedom, and Conscience: The American Revolution in Virginia, Massachusetts, and New York*. 1st ed. New York: Norton, 1976.
- Gundersen, Joan R. *To Be Useful to the World: Women in Revolutionary America, 1740-1790*. Rev. ed. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- Hartog, Hendrik. *Man and Wife in America: A History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Hill, Bridget. *Women Alone: Spinsters in England, 1660-1850*. New Haven London: Yale University Press, 2001.
- Hoffman, Ronald, Peter J. Albert, and United States Capitol Historical Society. *Women in the Age of the American Revolution, Perspectives on the American Revolution*. Charlottesville: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1989.
- Isenberg, Nancy, and Andrew Burstein. *Mortal Remains: Death in Early America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.
- Jensen, Joan M. *Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women, 1750-1850*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.
- John, Richard R. *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Kerber, Linda K. *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship*. 1st ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 1998.
- Kerber, Linda. "The Paradox of Women's Citizenship in the Early Republic: The Case of Martin Vs. Massachusetts, 1805." *The American Historical Review* 97, no. 2 (April 1992): 349-78.
- . *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*. Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1980.
- Labaree, Benjamin Woods. *The Boston Tea Party*. Northeastern classics ed. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1979.
- Leavitt, Judith Walzer. *Brought to Bed: Childbearing in America, 1750 to 1950*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

- Lewis, Jan. *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- . "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic." *William and Mary Quarterly* 44 (Oct 1987): 689-721.
- Lombard, Anne S. *Making Manhood: Growing up Male in Colonial New England*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Lyons, Clare A. *Sex among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender & Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1730-1830*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- Marsh, Margaret S., and Wanda Ronner. *The Empty Cradle: Infertility in America from Colonial Times to the Present, The Henry E. Sigerist Series in the History of Medicine*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Miller, Marla R. *The Needle's Eye: Women and Work in the Age of Revolution*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006.
- Norton, Mary Beth. "The Evolution of White Women's Experience in Early America." *American Historical Review* 89 (June 1984): 593-619.
- . *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*. 1st ed. Boston: Little, Brown, 1980.
- Perlmann, Joel, Siddali, Silvana R., and Whitescarver, Keith. "Literacy, Teaching, and Schooling among New England Women, 1730-1820." *History of Education Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 117-39.
- Rich, Wesley Everett. *The History of the United States Post Office to the Year 1829, Harvard Economic Studies, Vol. Xxvii*. Cambridge,: Harvard University Press, 1924.
- Richards, Jeffrey H. *Mercy Otis Warren, Twayne's United States Authors Series*. New York & London: Twayne Publishers; Prentice Hall International, 1995.
- Scheele, Carl H. *A Short History of the Mail Service*. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1970.
- Schlesinger, Arthur M. *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776*. New York: Reprinted by F. Ungar Publishing Co., 1968.

- Scholten, Catherine M. " "On the Importance of the Obstetrick Art": Changing Customs of Childbirth in America, 1760 to 1825." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (July 1977): 426-45.
- Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*. 1st ed. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1985.
- Smith, Merrill D. *Sex and Sexuality in Early America*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.
- Tannenbaum, Rebecca J. *The Healer's Calling: Women and Medicine in Early New England*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002.
- Ulrich, Laurel. *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750*. 1st Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.
- . *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*. 1st Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.
- Volo, James M., and Dorothy Denneen Volo. *Family Life in 17th- and 18th-Century America, Family Life through History*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006.
- Warner, Michael. *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Wertz, Richard W., and Dorothy C. Wertz. *Lying-In: A History of Childbirth in America*. New York: Free Press, 1977.
- Williams, Selma R. *Demeter's Daughters: The Women Who Founded America, 1587-1787*. 1st ed. New York: Atheneum, 1976.
- Young, Alfred Fabian. *Beyond the American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993.