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Gender Misapprehensions: The "Separate Spheres" Ideology, Quilters, and Role Adaptation, 1850-1890

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Drawing on a historian's perspective, I have used quilting as the context in which to study the validity of the "separate spheres" ideology. This concept is predicated on the belief that nineteenth-century women and men functioned in distinctly different worlds, or "spheres." With a focus on the American West in the years 1850 through 1890, I determined that the supposed invincibility of this doctrine was not the case. I examined and analyzed 112 sources, including gender studies, history, quilt studies, regional studies, and personal accounts. These primary and secondary resources included diaries, journals, period publications, articles, and books. My study reveals that attributes traditionally ascribed only to males, vis á vis *this ideology, were also embraced by female quilters. Artistic needs and aesthetic criteria were manifested by choices of color, design, and texture. Competitive drives included establishment and cultivation of quilting reputations and the desire for public acclaim. Political activism was embodied in quilts that raised money or registered a political vote. This abridgment, or adaptation, of two presumed "separate" spheres highlights the prescriptive construction of this theory and ultimately challenges the doctrine's factual foundation.*

> And in their quilts, especially, they found a capacious medium for expression; for vast numbers of nineteenth-century women, their needles became their pens and quilts their eminently expressive texts.[1]

For many people, quilting symbolizes the quintessential pastime of women in the nineteenth century. References to quilting are found

in practically every medium. Written descriptions include books, articles, and plays. Visual representations are portrayed in paintings and photographs. And, of course, there are the quilts themselves. These material links to women in the past are often the most direct witnesses of how quilters felt about their world. Quilts, as vehicles "through which women could express themselves," emotionally comforted these quilters as well as kept them warm.[2] Quiltmakers found joy in piecing together different blocks of material. Deborah Norris Logan, a prominent Quaker woman, wrote in her diary: "sewed at the patchwork, liked it. The variety of its little details amuse me much more than sewing on another scale does. And I keep at it once I sit down to it—by choice. And sometimes even a book lying near me does not tempt me to put it away. I sat at it—amused—after all were gone to bed."[3]

Sustaining motivation was essential for completing such a time-consuming and meticulous task as quilting, especially in an era where "leisure" time was minimal. An exceptionally intricate quilt, *1856 A Representation of the Fair Near Russellville, Kentucky*, created by Virginia Mason Ivey, is estimated to have over 1,200,600 stitches.[4] While most quilts do not contain this much needlework, even the simplest piece required dedication and long hours. The great-grandmother of quilt author Marguerite Ickis speculated it took her over twenty-five years, as her schedule allowed, to complete one quilt.[5] Yet because of the satisfaction derived from the enterprise, women found ways to fit quilting into their busy lives. Quilt researchers Elizabeth Weyrauch Shea and Patricia Cox Crews found that Nebraska quilters were quite willing to make necessary time adjustments in order "to make products that reflected meticulous care and craftsmanship, and that would reflect well on their needlework skills." Shea and Crews concluded that the amount of time required to produce a quilt is an argument against the common belief that nineteenth-century women quilted only for the utilitarian purpose of providing warm bedding.[6] This devotion to making quilts was certainly powerful, as attested by the granddaughter of nineteenth-century quilter Amelia Barbe: "I have some of her [Amelia's] tops that she pieced together on the treadle sewing machine after she lost most of her eyesight. She was blind in one eye and had about only twenty

percent vision in the other, but she kept on piecing. Some of the pieces don't meet...but it's interesting that she kept on trying to do the handiwork after she lost her eyesight."[7]

What would cause a visually impaired woman to continue quilting? Why would *anyone* engage in this activity? There is no simple answer, but it is possible to discern trends, and in some instances, specific explanations. Many researchers have concentrated on aspects of female "bonding"; that is, the need to establish and maintain links among a community of women. Sometimes this nurturance took place in quilting "bees" or sewing "circles." This is easily the most romanticized, popular image of quilters: a group of women sitting around a quilt, gossiping as they stitched. However, distance, weather, and work load more often dictated isolated, solitary quilting. Despite the fact that most quilting was done alone, at home, women did sometimes quilt as a group. The very rareness of communal quilting often enhanced its pleasure, as described in the following passage: "In cities and country alike...in many isolated areas, the quilting bee was the only source of social contact that many women had with each other. It brought people together; it was an opportunity to exchange news and recipes and quilting patterns, a time to have a party and to quilt."[8] Occasionally a quilt party was "the social event of the season," as in the rural area of New Helvetia (Sutter's Fort), California.[9] The get-together was important enough to warrant a brief notation in proprietor and founder John Sutter's diary: "All the people attended the quilting at Mrs. Montgomery's."[10]

Quilting also preserved female links that had been temporarily or permanently severed. A transient population was a characteristic of the nineteenth century. People uprooted their lives due to real or imagined opportunities as well as circumstances, and familial ties were strained by the distance. Quilts offered a way of maintaining contact: "When running fingers over the quilted surface, one could sense the elusive but undeniable presence of a quiltmaker hundreds of miles away."[11] While most women brought quilts with them, or constructed them once they arrived at their destination, a few ardent women actually quilted on the journey itself. It is believed that Mary Hezlep, assisted by female relatives, produced a treasured piece that has been passed down, in a matriarchal chain, to its present

owner. The quilt, *Road to California*, contains blocks with writing that illustrate the quilt's migratory construction.[12] Another immigrant, Rosina Catherine Widman, is also said to have quilted while on the trip to California. Widman's *Buds and Leaves* quilt is now in the possession of a female descendant.[13] Dorinda Moody Slade made a trail quilt as well, named *The Rising Sun*. She used the therapeutic value of quilting to work through the grief associated with the trail deaths of her son and three stepsons. Unfortunately, Slade was forced to sell the quilt for money, and, according to biographer Carolyn O'Bagy Davis, it no longer exists.[14]

Women also strove to maintain kinship bonds even after their deaths. While some women passed on quilts during their lifetime, other quilters' concern over *post obitum* care and ownership necessitated another course. They often made the effort to mention quilts in their wills, thus ensuring who would receive their prized possessions. The necessity of this forethought was dictated by entrenched social norms. American law was founded on principles established by English customs, one of which was the concept of "coverture." Under this system, when a woman married, her civil rights and identity were absorbed, or "covered," by her husband, technically rendering her a legal ward.[15] Despite the passage of various "Married Women Property Acts," which gave some protection (if enforced) to the living, when a woman died her personal and most valued belongings were still subject to the private and unchecked decisions of her widower.

Women usually specified female relatives as their beneficiaries. Author Patricia Mainardi described this process: "The women who made quilts knew and valued what they were doing. Frequently quilts were signed and dated by the maker, listed in her will with specific instructions as to who should inherit them, and treated with all the care that a fine piece of art deserves."[16] Occasionally a bequest was actually marked on the quilt itself, a sign that the donor was taking no chances. One surviving example exists in a quilt created by Sarah Mahan, whose careful planning was directly incorporated onto the piece: "This quilt commenced by our dear Laura and finished by me, principally from fragments of her dresses, I give and bequeath unto her sister Julia M. Woodruff, or in case of her death to her

sister Hila M. Hall, if she survives, otherwise to the oldest surviving granddaughter of their father, Artemas Mahan deceased."[17]

A possible impetus for quilting which has not been analyzed by historians is role adaptation. Because quilting is an endeavor so closely associated with past American women it is an important area in which to explore gender role satisfaction and adherence. Some historians believe that by 1850 an ideology of "separate spheres" existed.[18] According to the precepts of this theory, women were relegated to the private arena while men were assigned to the public realm. Inclusive attributes and duties were apportioned to each exclusive sphere, or domain. Among advocates there is a general consensus that by 1890 the doctrine had reached its effective apex, and the strict bipolarity of separate spheres had faded.[19] The rise of progressivism, family restructuring, and the growing diversity of the work force were said to be some of the factors that diluted the ideology's impact and created what Carroll Smith-Rosenberg referred to as the "New Woman." This time frame, 1850 through 1890, thus brackets a workable period in which to test for the presence of the separate spheres doctrine. Whether or not women or men truly occupied distinct spheres is an issue that this paper will investigate by studying European-American quilters, with an exploratory focus on America west of the Mississippi river.[20] Through examining artistic issues, aspects of status recognition, and political activism, a pattern of prescribed role satisfaction or dissatisfaction emerges. I submit that quilting, despite its reputation as a stereotypic female pastime, can be seen as a means to dispute the theory of a circumscribed world that strictly segregated women and men into different spheres.

During the first half of the nineteenth century a proliferation of prescriptive literature was published with the intent of "educating" women. Magazines such as *Godey's Lady's Book* and *Petersen's* contained articles that sought to guide females in their "proper" roles as wives and mothers. Sarah Josepha Hale, who became editor of *The Lady's Book* in 1837, wrote an editorial in the January 1839 issue that revealed her perceptions of the magazine's purpose:

> Since the first beginning of our editorial responsibility...it has been the first wish of our heart, in all our literary exertions, to do good, especially to and for our own sex. There must be an aim...that corresponds with

> the character and pursuits of those for whom the work is designed. We have often remarked, and we now repeat, that we do not seek to invite our sex to emulate the pursuits of men.[21]

Women were also inundated with advice on how to behave in books, poems, newspapers, and sermons. While this counsel was directed at middle-to-upper-class white women, the message is said to have filtered, by the dominant group's demeanor and general word of mouth, throughout society.[22] Virtues of piety, purity, domesticity, submissiveness, and self-sacrifice were applauded, while competition, eminent artistic achievement, ambition, and political activism were denigrated and/or discouraged. Women were expected to stay home and concentrate on the happiness of their husbands and children and be fulfilled through their assignment as society's moral guardians. The loftiness of the pedestal was meant to replace the equality of the sidewalk.

Scrutiny of the concept of separate spheres has resulted in a mixed historiographical record. Some scholars examined the dissemination of this advice and concluded there was an ideology of separate spheres for men and women in the second half of the nineteenth century. Barbara Welter, in "The Cult of True Womanhood," published in 1966, was among the early proponents of this theory. A number of scholars followed with works that analyzed different aspects of this worldly division, but ultimately asserted its validity. Some researchers were positive in their appraisal of separate spheres. Nancy Cott's *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* portrayed the distinct female world as a community of nurturing women. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg was equally affirmative in her essay "The Female World of Love and Ritual." She claimed that women's unquestioned separateness provided them sustenance and comfort.

Other historians, however, challenged this separate spheres theory as prescriptive rather than realistic. Nancy Hewitt argued that this division was a convenient device for researchers who assumed a "sisterhood" that did not exist. Hewitt contended that a community based on gender alone ignored class and ethnic issues, and that it only extended "the hegemony of the antebellum bourgeoisie." She observed that "evidence from the lives of slaves, mill operatives,

miner's wives, immigrants, and southern industrial workers as well as from 'true women' indicates that there was no single woman's culture or sphere; there was a culturally dominant definition of sexual spheres promulgated by an economically, politically, and socially dominant group." Hewitt concluded that "the development of a sense of community among various classes of women served as a barrier to an all-embracing bond of womanhood," thereby making no singularly exclusive sphere possible.[23]

Questions about the separate spheres doctrine also arose as a result of its artificial construction. Some scholars attacked the ideology by illuminating inconsistencies that contrasted with the idealized norm. Another dispute concerned the content of the theory's language. Linda K. Kerber's essay, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," dissected the metaphor of the sphere as a "figure of speech, the trope, on which historians came to rely when they described women's part in American culture." Even Carl Degler, an advocate of the separate spheres theory, unwittingly attested to its vulnerability when he stated that "the doctrine of the two spheres, like the Cult of True Womanhood, is an ideological *construction* [my emphasis]."[24]

The concept of separate spheres has also generated debate among American West specialists, albeit with less delineation. Some scholars contest its existence, others defend it, but most argue over nuances in meaning. A representative survey of historiographical works illustrates this point. John Mack Faragher notes that women took on some unfamiliar and taxing roles on the trip west, becoming "drudges" of labor, but only reluctantly and temporarily did so, returning to the domestic sphere as soon as they could.[25] Julie Roy Jeffrey agrees, though she does not see women in such an unremittingly pessimistic light. She concludes that women embraced domestic ideology as a cushion against hard times.[26] Glenda Riley also argues that roles did not change. She asserts that despite regional variations, women were more alike than not. Riley contends that a "female frontier" of shared experiences, in contrast to that of men, existed in the West because women's lives were more affected by their similar domestic duties than by any other factor.[27] An opposing viewpoint offered by Sandra L. Myres states that women's roles did indeed change, pre-

cipitated by conditions in the West. Myres advances a supposition that "place" (i.e., the American West) transformed perceptions and realities. She argues that women's altered duties, including participation in virtually all aspects of farm and ranch life, as well as the existence of a small number of female-owned businesses, illustrates adaptation.[28] This brief historiographical discussion highlights both the tenacity and the vulnerability of the separate spheres ideology among scholars.

An investigation into the lives of quilters during the latter half of the nineteenth century suggests a gender role flexibility that bridged the supposedly "separate" spheres. Contrary to the presumption among some historians, the assumed concrete division between the female and male worlds was actually porous. Thus, while women and men may have played different social roles they did not do so within distinctly separate spheres. In the nineteenth century quilting was perceived as a type of domestic marker that symbolized the apogee of womanhood, and thus was a good camouflage for any defiance. Patchwork was seen by many as a sign of industry and usefulness, yet quilters themselves viewed it as something more personal and representative of their desires, values, aspirations, and beliefs about society.[29] Historian Gayle Davis states that "nineteenth-century women created various opportunities, within what has always appeared to be the perfectly gender constant female world of quilt making, to achieve a kind of autonomy and personal fulfillment which broke from idealized behavior."[30]

One way in which it seems female quilters contested the separate spheres ideology was through the artistic achievement created on their quilt canvases. There are a number of studies that address the issue of quilts' artistic merits. Patricia Mainardi adamantly claims that men shut women out of the artistic process. Mainardi asserts that "women have always made art; but for most women, the arts highest valued by male society have been closed to them for just that reason. They have put their creativity instead into the needlework arts, which exist in fantastic variety." Artist Charlotte Robinson argues that quilting is an art form that should be judged by its own standards: "Quilts must be accepted on their own terms, not measured against painting and architecture; if we were to remove them

from the frame of reference of women's culture, we would obscure a unique aspect of their identity." Rozsika Parker, in describing the delineation between "fine" art and "craft" art, goes to the heart of the matter: "the real difference between the two are in terms of *where* they are made and *who* makes them."[31]

The *field* of art, like that of politics, was considered unbecoming to the "true" woman and outside her sphere. Yet quilters persisted in creating, sometimes from scraps of cloth, the power of choice.[32] Quiltmakers, like other artists, controlled their vision from start to finish. They developed a design, chose material, and coordinated colors, all for the purpose of producing a work of art. Quilters enjoyed exploring the creative process, but it conflicted with idealized female virtues that disdained preeminent artistic goals. Quilters' embodiment of aesthetic criteria thus appears to dispute prescriptive attributes ascribed in the separate spheres ideology. This is especially significant considering quilters often worked around difficult schedules and, for the most part, a discouraging society, yet still managed to develop art. These women were "part of a culture whose history denied women the ability to produce art and whose system of values failed to appreciate the technical complexity and visual sophistication of their work."[33]

Quilters crafted a variety of representations, both pictorial and geometric. The versatility of quilting appealed to women, as they were free to express their artistic desires. By exploring aspects of color, texture, line, and shape, quiltmakers became pioneers in abstract design.[34] Nineteenth-century quilters most likely did not realize the larger impact that their art form created, yet through experimentation they developed a variety of geometric forms that showcased artistic flair and innovative ideas. Art/quilt historian Jonathan Holstein reasoned that "pieced quilts are the most 'painterly' products of the vernacular tradition, both in appearance because of the use of geometric elements and abstract images, rectangular format, size and flatness, and in decorative technique: quiltmakers, in effect, 'paint' with fabrics."[35]

Artistic flair was obtained not only through methods of mathematical precision but also in pictorial techniques such as applique. The entire creation of a quilt was purposeful; at every step women

made conscious, aesthetic decisions about color, fabric, and design. Mary Elizabeth Lyons, who spent untold hours designing and producing her *Love Apple* quilt, was certainly aware of its artistry. She was concerned about the layout of each part as well the overall visual effect. Lyon's attention to the flow of her stitches as well as the palette of the quilt produced her masterpiece. Another woman, Kansas immigrant India Harris Simmons, recognized artistic accomplishment when noting her mother's creations: "Appliqued patterns of flowers and ferns, put on with stitches so dainty as to be almost invisible, pieced quilts in basket or sugarbowl or intricate star pattern, each one quilted with six or more spools of thread, the patterns of the quilting brought out in bare relief by padding."[36]

Quilters also challenged prescriptive behavior by embracing competitive urges. According to the separate spheres ideology, women were not expected to have a need for status recognition. Instead, they were to leave ambitious drives to men who had the option, of course, to leave the public arena for a safe, private world that women had established at home. Yet quilters consciously strove for status and engaged in ventures in which they directly competed with one another. Pride in one's work was a trait quilters took seriously, and they often embraced it as young girls. Grace McCance Snyder, an accomplished Nebraska quilter, learned early the necessity of striving for excellence: "Young as I was, I knew that Mama's needlework, her patching, was extra fine, and that it wouldn't be easy to learn to sew as well as she did; but it was during those days...that I began to dream of the time when I could make quilts even fine[r] than Mama's, finer than any others in the world."[37]

Reputations for fine quilting were earned, not given, and often began in a seemingly incongruous setting: the quilting bee. While social in nature, and valued as such, these gatherings were also a forum for judging or ranking each other's skills. Good quilters were envied and known, and often an invitation to these coveted bees was based on expertise. Mrs. John Logan, a nineteenth-century quilter, commented that "the better quilters were always sought after, [while] the least expert were graciously kept busy; among so many [in attendance] there were often drones, or unskilled needlewomen; these went into a kitchen and helped."[38] Another woman, Kathryn

Thomsen, noted that after the guests had left her mother would often take out those stitches unworthy of her valued quilt.[39] If a nineteenth-century woman's ability as a quilter was questioned often enough, she might not get invited to future bees. The perception was that she lacked pride and therefore could not be trusted with someone else's quilt. Not only did the disgraced lose out socially, but they lost desired status as well.[40]

The quilters' competitive drive was perhaps strongest when they entered quilts in local fairs and exhibitions. Women derived much satisfaction from winning, for it was a public acknowledgment of their achievement. A literary account that has struck a chord with generations of quilters alludes to this. Aunt Jane, as a representative, albeit fictional, nineteenth-century quilter, stated that "the County Fair brought to all a yearly opportunity to stand on the height of achievement and know somewhat the taste of Fame's enchanted cup."[41] Quilters' reputations rose and fell, depending on their placement at the competition.[42] Sometimes this "dishonor" was immediate, as fellow quilters attended the same fair. Disappointment and loss of status could last until the next fair's quilt contest, so women worked hard at making shorter stitches or improving their designs.[43]

Prizes awarded at fairs ranged from ribbons to gifts to money, a compensation certainly valued along with public recognition. Fairs not only rewarded skill and fostered pride, but they were also a means to circulate designs and patterns. Prizewinning quilts were often emulated by women who viewed the displays. As quilters absorbed new styles into their work, they in turn passed on a syncretic blend that influenced other women. Textile historian Virginia Gunn examined the records of fairs and studied the migration of various quilt patterns. She concluded that quilters used fairs as an educational tool to improve their methods.[44] Quilters' incorporation of honored patterns and colors reflected a conscious desire to update their own talents in order to replicate success, a drive ignored by idealized norms.[45]

While quilters embraced artistic achievement and competed for public acclaim, the area in which quilting most directly and explicitly confronted the separate spheres ideology was politics. A politically active woman would be a clear affront to a culture that valued

female submissiveness. Yet quilters' political challenges were usually not recognized as a disruption of the proper "order." Quilting was a female-associated activity and therefore ignored as a public threat. Even when quilting contributed significantly to a powerful cause, as in the case of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), it was disregarded. The association between quilters' assistance to the WCTU and their subsequent political awareness was not recognized for the potential public empowerment this engendered. Instead, the outrage and ensuing attack occurred toward the women who dared to venture into the public arena and challenge the hegemony of men. Frances A. Willard, who led the WCTU from 1879 to 1898, was a frequent target. As a visible advocate of the WCTU, Willard was ridiculed for her public stance. This is graphically and succinctly illustrated in a contemporary drawing, entitled "American Woman and Her Political Peers," that mocked Willard and placed her in the center of a calvacade of the undesirable, the disenfranchised and the despised groups of the time: an idiot, a criminal, a madman, and an Indian.[46] (Figure 1).

Quilts functioned as an outlet for women to express their political views. Since most American women did not achieve suffrage in the nineteenth century, quilts served as a ballot on which to cast their vote.[47] It is likely that Elizabeth Holmes registered her presidential choice in a 1869 quilt, *Patriotic*, that showcased Abraham Lincoln. Despite the fact that Lincoln was dead by the time this quilt was completed, the effort to include him intimates how this quilter might have voted, had she been accorded the opportunity.[48] Women used their skills to express candidate and party affiliations. One anonymous quilter, in a quilt named *Political*, deliberately placed James Garfield and Chester Arthur, Republican Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates in the 1880 election, at the center of her design.[49] Quilters also commemorated public and historical events, raised funds for various causes such as abolition and temperance, and ultimately agitated for suffrage.[50] Quilt patterns often expressed the quilter's patriotism and historical awareness, and were named accordingly. Even though the derivation of a quilt name is sometimes difficult to assess, the very act of naming a pattern to reflect America's heritage suggests, at the very least, a political sen-

Figure 1. Frances Willard depicted among the undesirable groups of the late nine-teenth century in a contemporary drawing. "American Woman and her Political Peers," Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

sibility beyond spherical boundaries. "Clay's Choice," which refers to politician and abolitionist Henry Clay, and "Burgoyne Surrounded," seemingly designed to simulate the successful Revolutionary War battle against British General Burgoyne, are two examples. Often these designs were incorporated years after the original event or person had passed. Quilt historian Barbara Brackman discusses this with regard to the "Burgoyne Surrounded" pattern: "I found no evidence that the design goes back to the Revolutionary War. I found several. . .examples. . .but none earlier than mid-19th century."[51]

During the Civil War women on both sides of the conflict quilted for their respective factions. The amount of money raised was staggering, and quilting provided women an opportunity to participate directly in the war effort. The private United States Sanitary Commission, which supported the Union cause, relied heavily on women's efforts. According to Virginia Gunn, "by the end of the war, the value of women's contributions made through the U.S. Sanitary Commission totaled $25,000,000." From Sanitary Fairs alone, organized and run by women, it is estimated that four and a half million dollars were raised for the North. During one eight-day fair in Iowa in 1864, women brought in $50,000 through the sale of their quilts. Quilts were an especially effective vehicle for relief. Based on Sanitary Commission disbursement records, by October 1864 the western arm alone had distributed 50,177 quilts that literally gave comfort to their troops.[52] This reliance on quilting was acknowledged, in a backhanded manner that belied its serious and recognized contribution, by Henry Bellows, president of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, when he described the Chicago Sanitary fair as a "great quilting *party* (my emphasis)."[53] What is perhaps more far-reaching was the activist training obtained as a result of running successful fundraisers. Women "became interested in causes outside their immediate circles and experienced the feelings of self-confidence that come from successfully completing a hard task."[54]

A popular method for quilters in the second half of the nineteenth century to express their opinions was through fundraiser quilts. Several different types of these quilts existed, but the most popular fundraising style from the 1860s to the 1890s was the signature quilt.[55] Women, and sometimes men, paid to have their names entered on

quilts, publicly stating their beliefs and raising money at the same time. In turn the quilts themselves could be sold to procure more funds. The WCTU benefited from this kind of support. Founded in 1874, the goals of the WCTU went beyond temperance, for the organization also agitated for the eight-hour workday, child care, and suffrage. A famous WCTU signature quilt, known as *The Crusader Quilt*, contains the names of 3,000 women who each paid a dime to be included.[56] Not surprisingly, quilts made in support of the WCTU relied heavily on the symbolism of "The Drunkard's Path" pattern. This convoluted design reportedly portrayed the lost soul of a misdirected drunk, and usually incorporated the blue and white colors of the movement.[57]

Women also quilted for suffrage, but unfortunately did not receive the same appreciation. Suffragists were often quite hostile to this pastime. Elizabeth Cady Stanton felt "it should be the study of every women to do as little of it as possible," while Abigail Scott Duniway, a suffrage leader in Oregon, stated that "quilts were the primary symbols of women's subjection."[58] Duniway's criticism is ironic, considering she once earned a living as a seamstress. Her extreme distaste of the "always ugly patchwork quilt" led to this diatribe: "Any fool can make a quilt; and, after we had made a couple of dozen over twenty years ago, we quit the business with a conviction that nobody but a fool would spend so much time in cutting bits of dry goods into yet smaller bits and sewing them together again, just for the sake of making believe that they were busy at practical work."[59] Her personal disdain of the job apparently colored her judgment of any woman who earned money as she once had. Even more striking is the fact that Duniway donated a quilt she had pieced in 1869, named *Hexagon*, to raise funds for the suffrage movement. This quilt was immediately purchased for the Oregon Historical Society because "it was too precious to send out of state."[60] According to historian Ruth Moynihan, who once examined the quilt, the stitching was poorly done and the colors violently clashed. This quilt "provides mute evidence that Abigail Duniway was both an abominable seamstress and possibly color-blind," and further illustrates how biased Duniway's perceptions were.[61]

Studying later nineteenth-century quilters provided an opportu-

nity to examine the validity of a dominating paradigm. My research suggests that many of these women bridged the supposedly "separate" spheres, assuming both a public stance and attributes traditionally assigned to men. These results question the impermeability and invincibility of the separate spheres ideology and call attention to the artificial construction, and thus prescriptive nature, of this scholarly theory. Quilters produced works of art that not only allowed them creative choice but possibility set some standards for future abstract design. They excelled in the artistic process inherent in applique. Aesthetic qualities were manifested by the selection of color, design, and texture. Women who quilted were also competitive. They consciously strove for the accolades associated with fine quilting. Reputations were often an integral part of quilting "bees," and as well, cultivated at fairs. Quilters also used a seemingly benign endeavor to agitate for causes. This political activism raised money and awareness at the same time, and as well, created a civic outlet denied by custom and law. Ultimately, this adaptation of dictated gender concepts challenges the factual foundation of the separate spheres ideology and highlights the problems inherent with gender assumptions. While it is reasonable to state that there were societal differences between women and men in the nineteenth century, it is unwarranted to couch the diversity in terms of absolutes. Definitives, especially those artificially scripted, run aground on deviations, exceptions, and caveats. Instead of referring to separate spheres, perhaps a better solution is to think of nineteenth-century gender dissimilarities along the lines of malleable social parts, or roles.

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10. *New Helvetia Diary* (San Francisco: Grabhorn Press, 1939), 25, as quoted in Garoutte, 54.
11. Jean Ray Laury and California Heritage Quilt Project, *Ho for California: Pioneer Women and Their Quilts* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1990), 11.
12. Ibid., 43.
13. Ibid., 53–54.
14. Carolyn O'Bagy Davis, *Pioneer Quiltmaker: The Story of Dorinda Moody Slade, 1808–1895* (Tucson: Sanpete Publications, 1990), 28.
15. Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sherron De Hart, eds., *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*, 3d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 531.

16. Patricia Mainardi, *Quilts: The Great American Art* (San Pedro: Miles and Weir, 1978), 6; see also Nancy Martin, *Pieces of the Past* (Bothell, Washington: That Patchwork Place, 1986), 17.
17. Ricky Clark, "Fragile Families: Quilts as Kinship Bonds," in *The Quilt Digest* 5 (San Francisco: The Quilt Digest Press, 1987), 5.
18. See Barbara F. Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1966): 151–74; Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780–1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).
19. For a detailed account, see Stephanie Coontz, *The Social Origins of Private Life: A History of American Families, 1600–1900* (New York: Verso, 1988), esp. chap. 7. See also Smith-Rosenberg, 176–81; Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: Free Press, 1989), chap. 6 and 7; Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Carl N. Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).
20. In spite of the burgeoning growth of quilt research, there is still a regrettable lack of scholarly material about other ethnic groups, as well as men in general, which necessitated this paper's particular concentration on European-American women. It is also important to note that while the paper emphasizes the American West, historiographical arguments may encompass other regions as well.
21. Sarah Hale, E. Leslie, and Louis Godey, eds., *The Lady's Book* 18 (January 1839): 94. This influential magazine underwent several name changes during its sixty-eight year existence. At various points it was titled *Godey's*, *The Lady's Book*, *Godey's Lady Book*, or *Godey's Lady Book and Magazine*. To further add to the confusion, it is not consistently listed in various card catalogs.
22. Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (June 1988): 25–26. Several pivotal books written to promote a woman's "place" were Catherine Beecher's *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, written in 1841, and Lydia Maria Child's *Frugal Housewife*, published in 1829. There was a wealth of literature in which male *and* female writers were only too happy to instruct women regarding their "proper" role.
23. Nancy A. Hewitt, "Beyond The Search for Sisterhood: American

Women's History in the 1980s," *Social History* 10, no. 3 (October 1985): 315–16; see also Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822–1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

24. Kerber, 10; Degler, 28.
25. John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).
26. Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840–1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979).
27. Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988).
28. Sandra L. Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800–1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982).
29. Susan Jenkins and Linda Seward, *The American Quilt Story* (Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press, 1991), 32– 41; Ferrero, Hedges, and Silber, *Hearts and Hands*, 24–26.
30. Gayle R. Davis, "Women in the Quilt Culture: An Analysis of Social Boundaries and Role Satisfaction," *Kansas History* 13, no. 1 (Summer 1990): 6.
31. *Quilts: The Great American Art*, 1; Charlotte Robinson, ed., *The Artist and the Quilt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 31; Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: Women's Press, 1986), 5.
32. C. Kurt Dewhurst, Betty MacDowell, and Marsha MacDowell, *Artists in Aprons: Folk Art by American Women* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979), 41.
33. *Artists in Aprons*, ix, 41–44; see also *Pieces of the Past*, 17; *Quilts: The Great American Art*, 16; "Nebraska Quiltmakers," 65; Marie D. Webster, *Quilts: Their Story and How to Make Them* (1915; reprint, New York: Tudor Publishing, 1948), xvii.
34. *Artists in Aprons*, xvii.
35. Jonathan Holstein, *The Pieced Quilt: An American Design Tradition* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1973), 116.
36. Joanna L. Stratton, *Pioneer Women: Voices From The Kansas Frontier* (New York: Touchstone, 1982), 69.
37. Grace Snyder, *No Time on My Hands* (1963; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 50.
38. *Quilts in America*, 51. See also *Quilts: The Great American Art*, 34–38.
39. "Nebraska Quiltmakers," 66.
40. Colby, *Quilting*, 140; "Nebraska Quiltmakers," 66.

41. Eliza Calvert Hall, *"Aunt Jane" of Kentucky* (New York: A. L. Burt, 1907), 73.
42. Jonathan Holstein, *American Pieced Quilts* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 11.
43. Edwin Binney and Gail Binney-Winslow, *Homage To Amanda: Two Hundred Years of American Quilts* (San Francisco: R. K. Press, 1984), 85; *Quilts in America*, 56–57; *American Pieced Quilts*, 11; *Hearts and Hands*, 63 64; *Pieces of the Past*, 38.
44. Virginia Gunn, "Quilts at Nineteenth Century State and County Fairs: An Ohio Study," in *Uncoverings 1988*, ed. Laurel Horton (San Francisco: American Quilt Study Group, 1989), 105–22.
45. Jeannette Lasansky, ed., *Bits and Pieces: Textile Traditions* (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Oral Traditions Project, 1991), 92; and Barbara Brackman, "Quilts at Chicago's World Fairs," in *Uncoverings 1981*, ed. Sally Garoutte (Mill Valley: American Quilt Study Group, 1982), 63–76; *Michigan Quilts*, 6–13.
46. *Hearts and Hands*, 86.
47. Women in parts of the West were granted suffrage in the late nineteenth century, but this was limited power, due to population size and prevailing custom, and was confined to only two areas by 1890: Wyoming Territory (1869)/ Wyoming State (1890), and Utah Territory (1870; revoked in 1887 by federal government)/ Utah State (1896). Colorado (1893) and Idaho (1896) were the only other states that gave women the right to vote before the twentieth century.
48. *Hearts and Hands*, 10.
49. Roderick Kiracofe, "Showcase," in *The Quilt Digest* 3 (San Francisco: The Quilt Digest Press, 1985), 40. There is no name given for the maker of this quilt.
50. *Pieces of the Past*, 24–26; Nancy Martin, *Threads of Time* (Bothell, WA, 1990), 84; *The American Quilt Story*, 52–53; Stratton, 253–55; *Hearts and Hands*, 10–11.
51. Barbara Brackman, "Patterns to Ponder," *Quiltworld Omnibook*, (Winter 1985): 6, as quoted in *Pieces of the Past*, 25.
52. Virginia Gunn, "Quilts for Union Soldiers in the Civil War," in *Uncoverings 1985*, ed. Sally Garoutte (Mill Valley: American Quilt Study Group, 1986), 97, 113.
53. *Hearts and Hands*, 77–80; *The American Quilt Story*, 57–61.
54. Gunn, "Quilts for Union Soldiers in the Civil War," 115.
55. Dorothy Cozart, "A Century of Fundraising Quilts: 1860–1960," in

Uncoverings 1984, ed. Sally Garoutte (Mill Valley: American Quilt Study Group, 1985), 41–53.

56. *Hearts and Hands*, 87.
57. *Hearts and Hands*, 15, 82–85; *The American Quilt Story*, 68, 85.
58. *Hearts and Hands*, 94; see also Ruth Barnes Moynihan, *Rebel for Rights: Abigail Scott Duniway* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), and Ruth Barnes Moynihan, *Abigail Scott Duniway of Oregon: Woman and Suffragist of the American Frontier*, vol. 1 & 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).
59. "Editorial Correspondence," *New Northwest* (July 8 1880), as quoted in *Rebel for Rights*, 153.
60. *Rebel for Rights*, 154.
61. Ibid.