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New and Improved: The Transformation of American Women's Emotional Culture by John C. Spurlock; Cynthia A. Magistro

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While she does consider civility in the context of aristocratic education, she does not tell us much about contemporary ownership, comment on, or use of the specific conduct works that she describes. While she relates some great stories about Restoration libertines, she does not voice much in the way of contemporary reports of more civil behavior. This would have been useful, not to line up actual behavior with the specific practices prescribed in the manuals, but to show the salience of the concerns or styles of behavior articulated by the books.

Still, given her contribution, these are minor failings. This remains an important and useful book. While densely written, it is jargon-free and accessible. Bryson's argument is complex, but she provides adequate signposting throughout. There is an extensive bibliography of primary and secondary sources. This book should be read by all who are interested in the history of manners. It should also be read by students of the social, cultural and political history of early modern Britain. Scholars of early Anglo-American elites will find it useful background reading.

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New and Improved: The Transformation of American Women's Emotional Culture. By John C. Spurlock and Cynthia A. Magistro (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998. xiii plus 213pp. \$35.00)

By closely examining the diaries, memoirs, and letters of fifty mostly well-educated northern women born between 1887 and 1916, John Spurlock and Cynthia Magistro have reconstructed some of the key transformations in the emotional lives of middle-class American women in the three decades prior to World War II. The result is a book that is rich in detailed insights that help demonstrate several major interrelated theses. Spurlock and Magistro argue that the heterosexual revolution of the early twentieth-century, which was sponsored by novels, movies, schools, advertisements, and the social sciences, left middle-class women unfulfilled and hurt. These women experienced pain due to the decline of homosocial networks and the raising of sharper taboos around homosexuality. Even emotionally strong women found it difficult to resist the culturally prescribed life course of flaming youth, all-encompassing marriage, and child rearing. In the end, the newly extreme emphasis placed on heterosexuality and companionate marriage fostered, not liberation, but the isolation of these women.

These are not particularly novel claims, but they are presented through an evocative biographical lens of "cultural history as personal history." (pg. ix) Spurlock and Magistro deserve our thanks for constructing a series of vivid portraits that give political significance to more diffuse cultural phenomena. However, it is at precisely this point where *New and Improved* should have more fully worked through a pair of related theoretical questions. The first half of this pair might be asked in terms of whether these women's diaries can provide evidence for general claims. Are they a representative group? On this note, Spurlock and Magistro admit that their evidence is particular in two senses. It focused on (1) largely white, middle-class, well-educated women who (2)

engaged in the unusual activity of persistent journal writing for a number of years. Although their detailed approach to everyday life limits them to a focus on eight persistently self-reflective women, they also included an evaluation of 42 less persistent diarists and autobiographic women. Given the nature of biographical methods, it seems to this reader that Spurlock and Magistro acceptably qualified their claims, expanded the number of women in their sample, and introduced significant interpretations of both popular culture and social science in order to deal with the problems of generalizing.

A more serious aspect of the question of "representativeness," is whether Spurlock and Magistro have handled the second part of what makes their primary sources particular. Because they are private, should we read diaries as special views into emotional reality? Implicitly Spurlock and Magistro answer "yes." They call the diaries "self-writing" to distinguish them linguistically from more public cultural productions. Throughout the work they use the diaries to document emotional expressions that were at odds with the constructions ostensibly forced upon women by male dominated social science, novels, plays, movies, advertisements, and educational curriculum. Unlike these "cultural" texts, the diaries are treated uncritically to document the emotional reality below, and distinct from, a world of contested truths. It is only by subtly essentializing diaries as windows upon "experience" that Spurlock and Magistro are able to argue that, "culture proved an inadequate guide to emotional life."(xii) In this turn of phrase "culture" is a map or "guide" to a tangible land called "emotional life" that appears only through the diaries. Their term "inadequate," used to modify "guide," is epistemologically inter-changeable with a more direct modifier, "false." This is only one phrase among many within the text that suggests to me that *New and Improved* is embedded in a discourse about historical action with a lineage that includes Marx's concept of "false consciousness." And these theoretical assumptions have come under serious attacks from leading scholars such as Raymond Williams and Joan Scott.

In fairness to Spurlock and Magistro, it must be noted that the problem of essentializing "experience," or the habit of reading some text critically while accepting others as transparent representations of reality, is common to the historical enterprise. The way to freedom from these problems is far from simple or clear. Yet, such difficulties seem particularly important for those who, like Spurlock and Magistro, are trying to negotiate the history of emotions. As I understand it, the history of emotions hopes to stand psychohistory on its head. Instead of looking for historical justification for current psychological theories, the history of emotions uses the past to reconstruct emotional sensibilities. Historians of emotions assume that love, hate, jealousy, and admiration etc. are historical products, and thus they presumably operate discursively, rather than psychologically. If this is true, then a key to understanding emotions is to critically examine the interplay between competing constructions of emotional life—including those offered privately by diarists. It seems to me that Spurlock's and Magistro's interpretations of the diaries were strongest, though still frequently uncritical, when they engaged in complementary textual work (often referred to as "contextual") with novels, plays, and social science. Their best efforts in this regard came in chapters 4 and 5 on marriage and motherhood.

It is worth highlighting that *New and Improved* is an engrossing book that

brings historical and moral significance out of the everyday words of women. Because of its accessibility and pointed clarity, *New and Improved* should be reviewed by historians who teach undergraduate courses on American women, families, and youth. Thus, even if it suffers from some interpretive weaknesses, and does not break new scholarly ground, it should encourage lively and useful discussions in college courses if properly complemented with other works.

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Destined for Equality: The Inevitable Rise of Women's Status. By Robert Max Jackson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998. 316pp.).

No one can contest the conclusion that women have gained more equality in American society since the 19th century. In *Destined for Equality: The Inevitable Rise of Women's Status*, the sociologist Robert Max Jackson attempts to tackle a provocative, but not totally original question related to this truism: Why and how have women made gains in a society dominated and controlled by men and male interests?

Jackson ultimately argues that women's rising status has not resulted as much from social movements as from the modernizing of society. He maintains that: "Gender inequality has been fated for extinction since the emergence of modern economic and political organization." Jackson contests feminist scholars' interpretations that the state has served to preserve male advantages and that it was women's daily and organized struggles which resulted in greater gender equality. While not dismissing the importance of activism, Jackson challenges its centrality as the major engine of change. Changes benefiting women did not always result from political protest, but occurred in other realms as well, including the state and business. If this was the case, then there had to be another overarching explanation.

In chapters 2 through 4, Jackson provides evidence for his modernization argument by examining the progress in women's status over a 150-year period in three arenas. He focuses on citizenship rights such as suffrage, property rights, and anti-discrimination legislation; employment; and institutional individualism, which opened up, for instance, educational opportunities for women. Modernizing trends such as the separation of home and work and the growth of businesses and government organizations, which Jackson claims lacked interest in "gender inequality's persistence," set the stage for its gradual decline.

The fact that gender inequality was incompatible with modern organization, according to Jackson, did not mean, however, that men necessarily promoted gender equality. Bureaucratic rationalization and the needs of the powerful in the legal and economic realms required changes in behavior. What resulted were gender-neutral policies that furthered women's interests and improved their status. Women gained property rights and access to jobs because men were trying to protect their own financial interests in the capitalist marketplace. These findings are not new to the historian. What is new is Jackson's explanation that such advancements in women's status stemmed from the development of