

# Second Thoughts on Gender and Women's History

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For a women's historian working on the antebellum period, the "cult of true womanhood" or the notion of "separate spheres" looms as an ever present, inescapable, even archetypal framework. As Linda Kerber has suggested, the trope of separate spheres has in fact determined the boundaries of the entire field of American women's history, because it simultaneously carved a space for women in the current historiography and a place for feminist inquiry in the historical profession. Nevertheless, many women's historians have questioned this ruling paradigm. Kerber notes that spheres operates as a spatial metaphor in much of the existing scholarship, which in turn frames women as historical subjects within a rigid dualism and insular conceptual domain.<sup>1</sup> Nancy Hewitt, bell hooks, and Christine Stansell have further demonstrated how race, class, and religion cut deep divisions—physical, material, and ideological—that make the unifying logic of women's sphere seem contradictory, if not illusionary.<sup>2</sup> In its place, historians have turned to the category of gender, which is not new to feminist scholars, but which has emerged as the most promising theoretical departure, especially for those scholars interested in expanding the range of topics explored by women's historians. Joan Scott added a new—and to some degree controversial—dimension to the meaning of gender by urging women's historians to embrace poststructuralist theory as well.<sup>3</sup> In this paper, I plan to review Scott's definition of gender, focusing on its strengths, possible pitfalls, and omissions. In the course of doing so, I will assess how several of the most influential studies of "separate spheres" elide the issues raised by poststructuralism.

Finally, I shall address the feminist underpinnings of these works, because neither Scott nor Kerber fully evaluates the politics of women's history.

Published in 1986, Scott's article, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," is a rallying-cry for women's historians to adopt "theoretical formulations" that could "transform . . . dominant disciplinary concepts." This is indeed a bold proposition. Accordingly, Scott argues that gender has not been treated as an analytical category, but instead has fallen short of this task for several reasons. Since historians tend to write narrative accounts of the past, those interested in women follow this tradition and use gender mainly as a descriptive device. The inadequacy of this approach, as Scott contends, can be seen in the accumulation of case studies on women that have quantitatively expanded what is known about the field, but have not qualitatively changed how most historians explain the fundamental "truths" of "History." Despite the sophistication and subtlety of the scholarship in women's history, Scott believes that the field will remain marginalized until efforts are made to place gender at the center of the most traditional of intellectual arenas—namely, the realm of political history. Scott offers a twofold plan to achieve this goal. First, historians must reconsider exactly how they define gender, recognizing that gender is based not only on "perceived differences between the sexes," but also on "signifying relationships of power." Second, historians must not limit their explanations of gender only to the social experiences of women; they must instead view gender as part of a larger system of relationships that link together the forces of ideology, normative behavior, political action, and identity formation.<sup>4</sup>

Scott presents a temptingly simple agenda for the future of women's history. Through a more rigorous and theoretically informed definition of gender, scholars will break through the glass ceiling by analyzing and reformulating the essential concerns of contemporary historians. But Scott does not explain how gender might replace such dominant paradigms as "separate spheres" or the "cult of true womanhood." This is in part because her initial definition of the problem leaves many unresolved questions. Can gender alone recast the goals of women's history? And to what degree should gender be informed by the theoretical insights of feminism?

Whether gender can assume the role mapped out by Scott is debatable. One difficulty emerges from her historical survey of the word itself. Scott notes that gender is derived from a grammatical practice which allows for distinctions between different word groups, but she does not offer an explanation for why and how the system of classification evolved. Nor does Scott consider the connection between gender and genre, a term which denotes a type, species, or class of composition with distinctive properties or conventions.<sup>5</sup> Instead, Scott's definition of gender is generic—she offers a list of potential attributes without exploring the limitations of transforming a grammatical distinction into a category of historical analysis. Scott identifies four major attributes of gender: its symbolic, political, and normative functions, as well as its role in identity formation. But

if gender operates as a catalogue of component parts, then questions arise over what determines the connection between these parts. Is one feature such as the symbolic granted more analytical weight than another, such as normative behavior? Is it even appropriate to distinguish normative behavior from symbolic action, thereby concealing how ideological forces and the imaginary or unconscious might link them together? And what happens if one attribute like identity formation is more closely linked to the past usages of gender? My point is that a system of classification is not a theoretical exposition, so the effort to condense other, more developed theoretical positions into a single category like gender may actually inhibit certain kinds of analysis.

There is another way to look at Scott's insistence that gender is about "processes" or interrelationships and cannot be reduced to the "search for single origins."<sup>6</sup> Here her penchant for classification could be viewed not only as a search for a stable set of characteristics, but as an attempt to ensure that the category of gender is critically evaluated when scholars use it in their work. Breaking with the tradition that gender is tied to its origin in a particular capacity—usually biological and sexual roles—Scott suggests that gender is defined in relation to other cultural and ideological forms. In effect, gender depends less on essential attributes than on its social function within a given historical period. This perspective does more than dismiss an essentialist view of gender; it also implies that gender relations are not a mere reflection of things as they are, but active constructions through which meaning is constantly transformed and reproduced.

Taken together, these views suggest that Scott's agenda is double-edged. On the one hand, the impetus for classification can provide for more detailed accounts of gender systems, but it does not preclude the possibility of relying on description rather than explanation. Though Scott chides women's historians for being "more comfortable with description than theory," her proposal does not necessarily solve the problem.<sup>7</sup> The act of giving gender a more rigorous definition does not protect it from misuse or from reproducing the problems found in its deeply ideological past. Historians may argue that gender is constructed and even detail the process, but with a single category of analysis, they might not unpack its persistent and complicated relation to the overdetermined category of sex which is subsumed under gender.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, Scott's effort to dismantle the implied unity between the function and value of gender relations is significant, because it forces historians to adopt a dual perspective in which function and value might be subject to different, if not contradictory, social and ideological determinations. The critical point here is to reject the assumption that value follows function—or that the meanings ascribed to gender relations are always reducible to the fundamental functions of sex and reproduction—or to its cultural artifacts of heterosexuality, marriage, family, home, and domesticity.

Scott is well aware of the major trends in feminist theory, but her review of the current feminist scholarship unduly emphasizes the disadvantages rather than

the advantages of applying these approaches to historical analysis. Theories of patriarchy, Scott concludes, ignore other forms of oppression and place too much importance on physical differences as a universal and ahistorical condition. Marxist feminists privilege economic causality, and for Scott they seem less capable of granting gender “an independent analytical status of its own.” Psychoanalytic theory is unappealing to Scott because of its narrow focus on family dynamics, the early stages of child development, or the conscious and unconscious construction of the gendered subject. Here again Scott finds the issues posed by theories of identity and subjectivity to be hampered by the tendency to universalize and reify sexual differences.<sup>9</sup>

Scott’s wholesale dismissal of feminist theory seems strangely at odds with her advocacy of theory, especially because she rejects these traditions mainly on *historical* grounds. In contrast to feminist theory, history is portrayed as if it had never succumbed to the error of generating universal truths, reifying sexual differences, or constructing historical subjects out of ideological cloth. The problem with Scott’s strategy is its unarticulated political assertion that gender (carefully distanced from a less appealing feminist past) is the foundation on which to rebuild the field of women’s history. The added irony is Scott’s invocation of Michel Foucault’s notion of power as “fields of force”: she implies that his theory of dispersed power can serve as a substitute for patriarchy, in which power is located in systems of male dominance.<sup>10</sup> Yet Scott’s selective appropriation of Foucault’s theory of power must be juxtaposed to what she chooses to ignore from Foucault’s formidable critique of history. What Scott ignores is Foucault’s challenge not only to a part but to the entire tradition called “History.” Dismantling the logic of History (its practices, functions, strategies, and value-systems, as well as its relation to knowledge as power) represents a very different approach to theory than simply adding a new category to the existing historical scholarship.

Several of Foucault’s themes have direct relevance to feminist concerns, especially the critique of universals, neutrality, objectivity, and the will to truth embodied in the humanist approach to history.<sup>11</sup> The subject of history has been Man, according to Foucault, and the ability to question this “founding subject” can be useful to women’s historians.<sup>12</sup> In regard to the theory of power, moreover, Foucault has not only cast power as dispersed; he has also challenged the traditional view that power is primarily exercised by the state through acts of overt political oppression or punishment. According to Foucault, power does not always originate in political institutions, display its force, or generate fear as a means of social control. By masking its full effect through its distribution to the “infinitesimal level of individual lives,” power can be made more tolerable, because its invasions are less obvious and concrete, and because its various forms are rarely identified with a single institution.<sup>13</sup> Foucault’s portrayal of modern disciplinary power as anonymous (everywhere and nowhere) thus offers a critical insight into women’s subordination: self-regulation, compliance, even consent

must be reevaluated not as individual choices but as acts that may be unconsciously shaped through the dispersion of informal disciplinary rules and practices.<sup>14</sup> Such a perspective not only challenges the monolithic image of patriarchal authority, but it also exposes a more fundamental feature of male domination: namely, the rationalization that women are *not really* oppressed because they have freely chosen to benefit from male protection, heterosexuality, domesticity, the sanctuary of the private sphere.<sup>15</sup>

Obviously, these issues are useful in assessing the dominant model of “separate spheres” in American women’s history. Contrary to Kerber’s review of the field, I do not believe that women’s history has moved through three stages, nor do I think that each stage has been marked improvements or corrections of earlier works. In fact, the shifts in women’s history from Barbara Welter’s 1966 essay, “The Cult of true womanhood,” to Nancy Cott’s *The Bonds of Womanhood* in 1976, to Suzanne Lebsock’s 1984 *The Free Women of Petersburg*, suggest dramatic changes informed by radically different—but not progressively improved—theories of feminism, history, sexual difference, power and ideology. Interestingly enough, Welter’s essay has been misread as both naming the problem of separate spheres and perpetuating its negative side as a model of female victimization. While Kerber acknowledged Welter’s wit and subtlety, she concluded that her “judgement of the separate sphere was a negative one . . . which denigrated women, kept them subordinate.”<sup>16</sup> Other women’s historians similarly agreed that Welter discussed only prescriptive values and roles for women, which was of course contrasted to a different and less constrictive reality which women constructed for themselves.<sup>17</sup> Nancy Cott also charged Welter with treating feminism and domesticity as opposites, and with identifying domesticity as a form of women’s oppression. Not surprisingly, Cott’s own study sought to “judge domesticity on its own terms,” by which she meant examining “women’s discovery and creation of psychic and social resources in their given situations.” In her reformulation, domesticity operated as a more “flexible” space which, instead of restricting women’s lives, actually allowed for their liberation, creativity, and self-discovery.<sup>18</sup>

Cott, however, never judged Welter’s work “on its own terms,” which was impossible to do anyway because Cott’s own project involved disarming the critical side of Welter’s work. Cott implied that her approach to domesticity was more objective, neutral, fair, and balanced, because she avoided moral judgments and instead offered a more flexible and fluid context for interpreting the meaning of separate spheres.<sup>19</sup> Yet Cott’s study was not any more objective or neutral than Welter’s: her model was adapted from the twentieth-century variety of feminism which focused on gender identity through “consciousness-raising” and sisterhood. As far as her methodological approach, Cott constructed domesticity from an idealist and instrumental perspective in which ideology (here she means a collection of ideas and beliefs) provided women with the necessary intellectual tools for refashioning the image of womanhood.

By reading the personal papers of “nonfamous women,” Cott also assumed that she had uncovered a more honest, personal, and less ideologically complicit source for understanding domesticity.<sup>20</sup> According to Cott, domesticity originates from the separation of women’s work within the private sphere of the family. Although Cott claims not to view women as “totally the mistresses of their destinies,” she inevitably stresses how domesticity unleashed for women a new “vocation” and even the “assertion of new social power.”<sup>21</sup> She believes that once domesticity is stripped of its prescriptive values, the creature Woman becomes the creator who carves domesticity in her own image. There is, however, a problem with the celebration of creativity, originality, vocation, and mastery implicit in Cott’s version. While Cott brings women into the canon of historical behavior (individuals who shape their destiny), she simultaneously denies the power of ideology to generate distortions, contradictions, and omissions that would grant domesticity a false coherence. In other words, ideology fosters unconscious, unexamined, and conventional assumptions which may actually obscure the real conditions of women’s material existence.<sup>22</sup> Discourses that claim the authority of truth, as Foucault has argued, make it difficult to recognize the nexus between knowledge and power, because truth is viewed as divorced from power.<sup>23</sup> Cott’s attempt to understand domesticity on its “own terms” tends to elide these difficulties by treating discourse and ideology as vehicles that merely transmit ideas but do not create or determine the subjectivity of the individual. Furthermore, the dangerous or contradictory elements of domesticity are eliminated, because Cott gives the ideal of “woman’s sphere” an internal logic and coherence through three crucial steps: first, the separation of spheres is spatialized through the division of home and work, and containment is reconfigured as the separate but equal formula in which women create their own subculture; second, the founding subject of Man is given a female counterpart who shares his creativity, but pursues different goals on her “own terms”; and third, ideology and false consciousness are sidestepped, since the private and psychic musings of women are treated as more authentic than public, prescriptive, and moralizing accounts of domesticity.

Cott offers her “canon of domesticity” as an alternative to Welter’s “cult of true womanhood,” consciously writing against the tradition of women as victims. Yet Welter’s essay, and Gerda Lerner’s “The Lady and the Mill Girl,” both of which Cott categorizes as examples of this victimization genre, are not really so simple or reducible when read as theoretical pieces.<sup>24</sup> Welter’s rather famous essay has gained the most notoriety for one passage: her list of the “four cardinal virtues” of true womanhood—“piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.”<sup>25</sup> While Kerber and others recognize Welter’s adaption of Betty Friedan’s argument from *The Feminine Mystique*, published three years earlier in 1963, less attention is paid to literary influences, especially the strong similarity between Welter and Mary Ellman’s 1968 *Thinking About Women*. Like Welter, Ellman addresses the issue of how writers classify experiences through sexual analogy

and stereotypes, exposing what Toril Moi has described as “the ludicrous and illogical nature of this sexual mode of thought.”<sup>26</sup> Both Welter and Ellman use irony to highlight the instability of feminine stereotypes. Welter, for example, demonstrates how any discussion of female virtue is always contrasted to the countervailing notion of female vice, and that such oppositions apply to all the categories of true womanhood: submission is contrasted to superiority, piety to heresy and irreligion, purity to pollution, and domesticity to disorderly public behavior.<sup>27</sup> Equally significant, Welter and Ellman both come to the conclusion that any stereotype “carrie[s] within itself the seeds of its own destruction,” and they further imply that ideology has its own inherent limitations and gaps, so it does not necessarily comprise a unified whole.<sup>28</sup> Gerda Lerner’s 1969 article comes to a similar conclusion, arguing that the image of the “Lady” masked the inherent contradiction in the experience of the “Mill girl” who defied all the prescriptive virtues as a wage laborer, public actor, and unmarried woman outside the private sphere.<sup>29</sup> Later evaluations of Welter’s and Lerner’s works miss their crucial insight about ideology, in part because stereotypes or contradictions are ignored rather than examined for their deeply political meaning.

The evasion of ideology reached its pinnacle in Suzanne Lebsock’s 1984 *The Free Women of Petersburg*, which views the antebellum concept of separate spheres as fostering “two standards, two scales of achievement, and two sets of values.”<sup>30</sup> Lebsock further argues that the cult of true womanhood was both “plausible” and “elastic,” because it reflected the basic values of the female character identified through the personality traits of kindness, moral virtue, and religious devotion. Despite the similarity between Cott and Lebsock, they diverge in an important way: Cott treats domesticity as the path to individuality and gender identity, while Lebsock views it as a reflection of a core female identity which takes the form of what she calls “personalism.” Furthermore, Lebsock rejects what she sees as the “feminist-whig tradition” of equating progress with feminism (and equality of the sexes), instead following the lead of scholars such as Carl Degler who dismiss the contribution of the nineteenth-century women’s rights movement. What makes Lebsock’s work different is the degree to which she was influenced by Carol Gilligan’s 1982 book, *In a Different Voice*. By celebrating the “obvious differences” between men and women, Gilligan argued that women developed their values through relationships, “contextual thinking,” and the ethic of care, while men relied on absolutes, abstract reasoning, and individual achievement. Lebsock’s concept of “personalism” echoes this view, maintaining that antebellum women worked from a “personal frame of reference” rather than an abstract system of merit.<sup>31</sup>

What is troubling about Lebsock’s message is that it revives a version of female essentialism: women make personal decisions because they think like women. Her allies, particularly Carl Degler, defend an even more traditional essentialist standpoint: women are different because of their reproductive roles, and their attraction to domesticity, with its recognition of family and relation-

ships, simply reflects the core reality of women's lives as mothers.<sup>32</sup> For Lebsock, however, the canon or cult of domesticity is a pragmatic framework which operates on the level of common sense and thus is somehow divorced from the hegemonic consequences of power relations between men and women. Individual women might suffer, survive, even subvert domesticity, but women as a group were destined to share similar values that allowed them to gain support from their female world of personal choice. Given the personal and practical nature of women's behavior, antebellum women were not submissive, pious, pure, and domestic because of patriarchy or ideology. Instead, the free women of Petersburg accepted their gender roles because in their daily lives such choices worked, made sense, and allowed them to achieve fundamentally different goals from men and thereby preserve a distinct women's culture.

Lebsock's analysis therefore denies that ideology has any substantive power, except to compliment women's personal choices and decisions. There is little room for exploring either the negative consequences of domesticity or for considering how "personalism" cloaks social conventions by making them appear natural and sensible. Womanhood and sisterhood are combined in a false unity that is unmediated by ideology or discourse of any kind. There is a totalizing quality to Lebsock's interpretation that implies that domesticity can explain everything about women, even the most unlikely of actions such as their political behavior. Because her observations ignore the impact of ideology, the question remains: how does this synthetic approach account for the fragmented, if not conflicted, identities of women?

Gender alone will not rescue such approaches, despite Joan Scott's faith in the rigorous development of gender as a new analytical category. Women's historians have not been misled by their analytical tools. The difficulty goes to the heart of historical scholarship, and the degree to which women's historians have *or have not* questioned the fundamental guidelines of history; namely, how do historians evade ideological questions by relying on identity and self-recognition to center their narratives, and how do they use the concepts of originality, rationality, and free choice to ground their scholarly practice? Women's historians have been as likely as other historians to adhere to these conventions, and their use of theory has yielded mixed results. This is not because of any discomfort with theory, but because of the assumptions that are embedded in their theoretical choices. Welter and Lebsock offered different interpretations not simply because one highlighted victimization and the other personal choice. Instead, each has a different, theoretically informed perspective on ideology and power, and this in turn produced a radically different approach to history. Lebsock believed that she had uncovered the core identity and social reality of women which elevated the mundane over the ideal, while Welter wrote against the historical claim that the "cult of domesticity" ever constituted an unmediated reality for women.

What women's historians need, then, is not a new concept or analytical category, but rather a culture of inquiry which enables us to transform our diffuse



and fragmentary evidence into discursive power. In order to achieve such a transformation, women's historians must strive to tell a different history in ways that are both theoretically sophisticated and yet persuasive to those of us who have been labelled—I hope with levity—as the theory impaired. Unfortunately, being persuasive has too often led historians—feminist and otherwise—to invent new metanarratives that are no less reductive than the ones they attempt to replace or correct. Though Scott offered “gender” as a corrective to the metanarratives of women's history, it has not succeeded in its task, primarily because its undeveloped critical edge allowed it to be subsumed into traditional descriptive histories. It remains to be seen how gender will operate in a poststructuralist setting, but one thing is clear: new concepts alone cannot eliminate the enduring ideological power of separate spheres. To dismantle the canon of domesticity, women's historians must avail themselves of the less fashionable but still indispensable resources of feminist practice.

## Notes

I would like to thank Gerda Lerner and Terry Whalen for their suggestions.

1. Linda Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History,” *Journal of American History*, 75 (June 1988), 10-17, 38-39.

2. Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana, 1982), xii; and Nancy Hewitt, “Yankee Evangelicals and Agrarian Quakers: Gender, Religion, and Class in the Formation of a Feminist Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century Rochester, New York,” *Radical History Review* 28-30 (1984), 327-42; and idem, “Beyond the Search for Sisterhood: American Women's History in the 1980s,” *Social History* 10 (October 1985), 299-321. Also see bell hooks, “Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women,” in *Feminist Philosophes: Problems, Theories, and Applications* edited by Janet A. Kourany, James P. Sterba, and Rosemarie Tong (Englewood Cliffs, 1992), 391-404.

3. All of my references are from Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis,” *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), 28-50. This article first appeared with a different title, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” in the *American History Review* (December 1986).

4. *Ibid.*, 30.

5. *Ibid.*, 42-44.

6. See Chris Baldick, *The Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford, 1991), 90-91; and J.A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, 1991), 366.

7. Scott, 42.

8. *Ibid.*, 30.

9. Donna Haraway argues that the original distinction between sex and gender emerged among feminist scholars as a method for removing women “from the category of nature” and for placing them “in culture as constructed and self-constructing social subjects in history.” Because feminists tend to argue “against ‘biological determinism’ and for ‘social constructionism,’” feminists at times “quarantine[d]” the concept of gender from the “infections of biological sex.” At the same time, another pattern among feminist scholars is to treat the categories of nature and the body as “sites of resistance to the dominations of history,” but in doing so, scholars obscure the “overdetermined aspect of ‘nature’ or the ‘female body’ as an oppositional ideological resource.” My point is that sex has an ideological significance which should not be sidestepped in theories of gender. For her discussion of the long and complicated legacy of sex/gender systems, see Donna Haraway, “‘Gender for a Marxist Dictionary: The Sexual Politics of the Word,’” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York, 1991), 127-48.

10. Scott, 33-41.

11. *Ibid.*, 42.

12. See Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, edited and translated by Donald F. Couchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, 1977), 139-64; and *The Order of Things: Introduction to the*

*Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, 1970); and Biddy Martin, "Feminism, Criticism, and Foucault," *New German Critique* 27 (Fall 1982), 12-13.

13. See Michel Foucault, "Appendix: The Discourse on Language," in *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, Translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York, 1972), 227-228; and Isaac D. Balbus, "Disciplining Women: Michel Foucault and the Power of Feminist Discourse," in *Feminism as Critique*, ed. and introduced by Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell (Minneapolis, 1987), 116.

14. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York, 1979), 215, 218, 222; and Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice & Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford, 1987), 121.

15. Sandra Lee Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," in *Feminism & Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, edited by Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby (Boston, 1988), 74-75.

16. For a discussion of how the notion of "sex" relies on the discourse of heterosexuality, and how Foucault offers a critique of this binary opposition, see Judith Butler, "Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig and Foucault," in *Feminism as Critique*, 128-42.

17. Kerber, 12.

18. See Gerda Lerner, "Placing Women In History: Definitions and Challenges," in *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (New York, 1979), 149.

19. Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven, 1977), 198-99, 203-204.

20. The reception and marketing of Cott's book echoed the view that her study was impartial, tactful, and therefore different from more dogmatic feminist interpretations. On the back cover of the 1979 paperback version, one reviewer, Helen Moglen, expressed these sentiments: "Cott demonstrates a rare ability to project herself into the context of her subjects. She is never judgmental. She does not measure the women whose lives she analyzes so well according to a standard which is not theirs. She does not blame these American Victorians for being Victorian. She accepts evolution without wishing there had been a rush to the ramparts."

21. Cott, 194, 197-99, 201, 203-4.

22. *Ibid.*, 4-5.

23. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and State Apparatuses (Notes Toward an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster (New York, 1971), 162, 171-74. Foucault rejects the concept of ideology, because it "always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth." He also believes that ideology "stands in a secondary position relative to something which functions as its infrastructure, as its material, economic determinant." Although Althusser unpacks one of these oppositions (symbolic/material), it is still important to evaluate ideology as part of other discursive practices. See *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (New York, 1984), 60.

24. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings, 1972-1977* (New York, 1980), 131.

25. Cott, 198.

26. Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," in *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens, 1976), 21. This article was originally published in the *American Quarterly* in 1966.

27. Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London, 1985), 32.

28. This theme of contrasting virtue with vice is elided in Cott's interpretation of Welter's article. In fact, in an earlier work, Cott only mentions the four cardinal virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Even more revealing, however, she wrote: "The cult of true womanhood had such wide range and effect because it concerned not only women's ideal characteristics but also the nature and functions of family life. Its focus of attention was not the virtuous maid versus the false coquette (a favorite theme of the eighteenth century), but the virtuous wife and mother, whose role had everything to do with harmony in the home." The possibility for contradictions is removed from Cott's version, despite the fact that the cult of true womanhood offered a series of oppositions to untrue women, including not only mill girls, but prostitutes, slaves, and religious "heretics" and political "fanatics" like Frances Wright. See Cott, ed., *Roots of Bitterness: Documents of the Social History of American Women* (New York, 1972), 11.

29. Welter, 41; also see Moi, 38.

30. Gerda Lerner, "The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson, 1800-1840," in *A Heritage of Her Own: Toward a New Social History of American Women* (New York, 1979), 190-91. This essay was originally published in *Midcontinent American Studies Journal* in 1969 and revised in 1979.

31. Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York, 1984), 144.

32. *Ibid.*, xvi, xix, 50-53, 125, 143, 197. For an astute discussion of Gilligan and Lebsock, see Joan C. Williams, "Deconstructing Gender," *Michigan Law Review* 87 (February 1989), 802-3, 807-9.

33. For examples of Degler's essentialism, see "On Rereading 'The Woman in America,'" *Daedalus* 116 (1987), 205. Also see his "Darwinians Confront Gender; or, There Is More to it than History," in *Theoretical Perspectives in Sexual Difference*, ed. by Deborah L. Rhode (New Haven, 1990), 33-46.