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American Women and Gender

Final Research Essay

Periodical Challenges to Patriarchy: How Women and Periodicals Influenced Each Other in Early American History

The magazine in early America, not unlike other print media of the time, was one of the most important means through which social and cultural ideas about the role of women could be shared and disputed. A debate over the equality of the sexes took form as questions began to appear in print. In *The American Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, one author asks, “How trite are these Sayings, What should a Woman do with Learning? A Woman has Knowledge enough if she can manage her Family, Study is not for Women. But how absurd are they? And what Ignorance does it argue in the Men who utter them, does the Mind differ with the Sex?”¹ These words could well have been spoken by Judith Sargent Murray, whose “On the Equality of the Sexes” article published in *The Massachusetts Magazine* famously asked, “In what the minds of females are so notoriously deficient, or unequal.”² But these were not Murray’s questions. They were written and published in *The American Magazine* forty-five years earlier. By tracing references to and about women in magazines prior to and just following the American Revolution, this article will show that periodical challenges to male patriarchy existed long

¹ “Remarkable Instances of the extensive Capacity of the FAIR SEX,” *The American Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, Aug 1745; 2; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 344.

² Judith Sargent Murray, “On the EQUALITY of the SEXES,” *The Massachusetts Magazine; or, Monthly Museum*, Mar 1790; 2, 3; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 132.

before revolutionary rhetoric began speaking of American independence. Even the traits of republican motherhood were discussed in magazines long before the Revolution. In this way, the magazine created a forum of revolutionary possibilities for women by introducing their role as republican wives and mothers before colonists were even discussing the possibility of a revolution in government. Perhaps even more significant is the way in which gender seems to have played a role in the success or failure of various magazines. While scholars often see the development of periodicals in early America as a series of failed ventures, those magazines that lasted longer than others typically mentioned and addressed women more often than those that failed within a few publications. While excluded from the political realm, it is possible that women wielded their own power over capitalism, particularly as editors realized their need for female subscribers.

Why Magazines?

By analyzing magazines, this study follows the theoretical assumption of Robert Darnton that sees written works in a society as “a guide to its culture.”³ Of course, we have to be careful not to assume that the reading public of early America inhabited a single culture (beyond being literate), either before or after the American Revolution. Robert Gross warns us against associating print and the public sphere with private individuals within America’s culture. Rather than acting as a cultural guide, early American publications could be seen as part of, as Gross explains, “the animating vision of the eighteenth-century Republic of Letters, the cosmopolitan community of learned men dedicated to inaugurating the rule of reason.” Even women authors could be a part of this learned community. “So, too,” Gross continues, “did such writers as

³ Robert Darnton, “Reading, Writing, and Publishing in Eighteenth-Century France: A Case Study in the Sociology of Literature,” in *Historical Studies Today*, eds. Felix Gilbert and Stephen R. Graubard (New York: Norton, 1972), 238.

Mercy Otis Warren and Judith Sargent Murray seize upon the instrument of reason to enter the public sphere and challenge traditional prejudices against their sex.”⁴ While it is true that many authors in late-eighteenth century print were part of a philosophical culture, magazines occupy a unique place in print culture.

Magazines are a useful way of studying the social and cultural ideas of the past for a number of reasons. While it is true that periodicals relied on a literate society (both writers and readers) which may bias our understanding of the past toward elites, magazines were unique from newspapers and books because they relied on subscriptions from the general public and also incorporated correspondence from anyone willing to send in a written work. There is no way of telling the percentage of submitted work that was published, or how many of those letters were written without pseudonyms. Nevertheless, magazines were advertised to and contained writings from audiences across the colonies (and states). They also presented the general population with a new medium of engaging with the wider public.⁵ Given the periodical’s reliance on a purchasing public, tracing changes over time also helps scholars answer an important cultural question regarding early American society: what sells? A common saying today suggests that “sex sells,” but was it any different in the eighteenth century? The goal of this research is to examine both the role of women in shaping the American magazine and how they were depicted in these early periodicals. By outlining trends and changes in the magazine

⁴ Robert A. Gross, “Print and the Public Sphere in Early America,” in *The State of U.S. History*, ed. Melvyn Stokes (New York: Berg, 2002), 259.

⁵ For some of the first extensive studies on America’s earliest magazines, see Albert Smyth, *The Philadelphia Magazines and their Contributors, 1741-1850* (Philadelphia: Robert M. Lindsay, 1892); and Algernon Tassin, *The Magazine in America* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1916). In recent years, with added accessibility due to the release of the *American Periodicals Series Online*, more studies have appeared on this topic. One notable work is Mark L. Kamrath and Sharon M. Harris, eds., *Periodical Literature in Eighteenth-Century America* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005).

industry just before and after the American Revolution, this essay explains the importance of women on the purchasing public in late-eighteenth century America.

Patriarchal Periodical

The first magazines printed on the American continent were part of a marketing war between two gentlemen in Philadelphia. The plan for printing a regular periodical was ostensibly stolen from Benjamin Franklin when Andrew Bradford preemptively released *The American Magazine; or, A Monthly View of the Political State of the British Colonies* on January 1, 1741. Franklin's own *The General Magazine, and Historical Chronicle, for all the British Plantations in America* came out shortly thereafter. Both magazines were to be printed monthly, however, neither lived very long. *The American Magazine* lasted only three months, while *The General Magazine* had six issues. It could be argued that the earliest magazines were male-focused in terms of their content. *The American Magazine* printed constitutions from the various colonies, information on the British war with Spain in the West Indies, religious debates, economic and monetary explanations, and tidbits about European monarchical succession. There is very little discussion in this magazine that merits gendered analysis (beyond the obvious exclusion of women) and the only women to be mentioned are members of European royalty. Intriguingly, the third and final issue of this publication included a letter written to the publisher in defense of the right of "private persons ... to inquire into the nature of government."⁶ Of course, these private individuals were repeatedly referred to as men, and women's exclusion was never mentioned.

The idea that women occupied a sphere outside of politics was not avoided in print before or during this period. In fact, while women were virtually excluded from *The American*

⁶"To the Publisher of the American Magazine," *The American Magazine; or, A Monthly View of the Political State of the British Colonies*, Mar 1, 1741; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 109.

Magazine, the “fair sex,” as they were often called, can be found in other prints.⁷ In February 1705, Robert Beverly published his *History of Virginia* in four parts. As the earliest periodicals placed significant emphasis on government, it should seem unsurprising that portions of Beverly’s work regarding politics would be reprinted in the magazines of 1741. Indeed, Benjamin Franklin chose to include some of Beverly’s writings on Virginia’s Constitution in his second issue of *The General Magazine*. With regard to enfranchisement and the election of Virginia’s Assembly, we learn the following: “The Freeholders are the only Electors, and wherever they have a Freehold (if they be not Women, or under Age, or Aliens) they have a Vote in the Election.”⁸ Beverly also explained that women and children were exempt from taxation, though this excerpt would be reprinted two months later in the April issue of *The General Magazine*. Franklin’s inclusion of these excerpts that mention women shows that even in political discussion, women could be mentioned, if only to point out their exclusion. These passing references to women, however, were not directed to women, but to the political body of men.

While women may have had little place in eighteenth-century politics, Franklin’s magazine did not limit its potential audience to men. Also, some writings even illustrate certain forms of oppression toward women. In the fourth issue released in April, the *General Magazine* published a poem sent by the anonymous A.B. who laments “the slavish state” of women, both before and after marriage. Rather than fighting off their slavery, however, the author encourages women to be resigned to their state. “Ye Fair attend,” she warns, “and be secure, In either Scene

⁷ While there are instances where men are referred to using the term “sex,” this is most commonly used to refer to women, particularly as the “fair sex,” as found here: C.L., “From the Virginia Gazette,” *The General Magazine, and Historical Chronicle, for all the British Plantations ...*, Jun 1741; 1, 6; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 412.

⁸ R. Beverly, “History of Virginia. Of the Constitution of Government in Virginia,” *The General Magazine, and Historical Chronicle, for all the British Plantations ...*, Feb 1741; 1, 2; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 83.

of Life.” In reading the poem, it is clear that this author recognizes the power men maintain in courtship and in marriage, though no point is made to discuss possible challenges to this male-favored situation. There is no way of knowing A.B.’s gender, though the use of such terms as “we” positions the author as a woman. Thus, to American audiences in 1741, a woman may bewail “every Female’s Doom” of marriage but she accepts her submission, understanding that “Satan shall guide the tim’rous Maid, And God instruct the Wife.”⁹

In the following month’s issue, Franklin included some letters allegedly written by a Mrs. Martha Harward of Charles-Town, South Carolina. The person who submitted the letters to the magazine claimed to have found them in 1738 just after Harward’s death. He sent the letters to *The General Magazine* “to the End that Women may be more wise, and Men more honest.”¹⁰ This tells us that this individual, as well as the printer, had an intended audience that contained both men and women. The wisdom that women are to gain from the letters is assumingly to avoid allowing passion to overcome their reason and religion. The passion that has overcome Harward makes her writings often incoherent and therefore difficult to discern. However, her incoherence has a poetic nature as she shares her distress over the man that she loves and his obvious love for another woman. We could assume that the man is her husband, since she’s introduced as *Mrs.* Harward, though there really is no way of telling in the letters themselves. In their presentment to the public, the letters do not paint women in any favorable light, and they support the position in A.B.’s poem that women are turned away from their lovers if they allow their passions to reveal their eagerness in love. Also, rather than questioning or addressing any

⁹ A.B., “Poem 1 – No Title,” *The General Magazine, and Historical Chronicle, for all the British Plantations ...*, Apr 1741; 1, 4; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 278.

¹⁰ “Essays,” *The General Magazine, and Historical Chronicle, for all the British Plantations ...*, May 1741; 1, 5; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 335.

male privilege over her relationship, Harward must remain complacent or embrace her passions to the point of total submission in death.

A common theme in the telling of the history of America's magazine is death: not of women or men but of the magazine itself. Few magazines lasted longer than a year. Based on some of the material, it is clear that publishers included works directed toward women readers, but perhaps their early demise came because they were not delivering what a subscribing female public desired. In his study of these earliest magazines in American history, Algernon Tassin argues that publishers "had cocked a disdainful calculating eye on the woman-interest. ... With a dancing-master bow, derisively *de rigueur*, the editors make their compliments to ladies, exploiting their sins and their follies and their vanities while pretending to censure them – for the sake of the human interest the long list of failures had shown was indispensable."¹¹ Negative traits were commonly attributed to women, even in poems, illustrating them as envious, jealous, gossipy, overbearing, and dim-witted. While the initial magazines to appear did not explicitly request a woman's voice or ear, this does not mean women were discouraged from participation or even ignored as possible subscribers. By including statements directed to women, or even reprinting conversations between women from the *New York Weekly Journal*, Franklin obviously intended his *General Magazine* to have a woman's audience. Of *The General Magazine's* six issues, women are mentioned or addressed in twenty articles though, despite the possibility of having a women's audience, virtually none of these articles present women without some degree of disdain or attempting to give them advice (with the exception of a news report telling of a woman's murder by her husband).

From Patriarchy to Promotion

¹¹ Algernon Tassin, *The Magazine in America* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1916), 15-16.

When magazines appeared again in 1743, their treatment of women had somewhat changed, depending on the venue. Lest anyone think glowingly of women, in its first issue *The Boston Weekly-Magazine* printed a poem that included the following lines:

Remember you, for others will,
That Woman is a Creature,
Of Flatt'ry vain, expos'd to Ill,
And doubly frail by Nature.¹²

It would seem as though this particular magazine intentionally chided women. In an article entitled “Of Impudence, and false Modesty” in the second issue, the author points to various different types of false modesty “in the female world.”¹³ As examples, he draws upon fictional characters, including *Lactilla*, the milkwoman in Ann Yearsley’s writings, and *Chloe* from Greek mythology. Of course, in a different article in the same issue another author points to Greek mythology in his praise of women, saying, “I don’t despair of seeing the Arts and Sciences inspir’d by the Ladies as well as the Muses.” This may be less praise for women than his belief that “to be in their good Graces is to be happy at least.”¹⁴ Either way, the *Boston Weekly-Magazine* launched its publication with a less-than favorable illustration of women in a few articles.

Women are mentioned again in the third issue of this magazine, only this time filled with praise—of a certain kind. The editors chose to publish “An Account of the Indians at Carolina,” from a 1688 letter. Note the credit given to native women: “the marry’d Women being modest

¹² “To a Postical Lady,” *The Boston Weekly-Magazine*, Mar 2, 1743; 1; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 6.

¹³ “Of Impudence, and false Modesty,” *The Boston Weekly-Magazine*, Mar 9, 1743; 2; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 9.

¹⁴ “Of Papers of Entertainment,” *The Boston Weekly-Magazine*, Mar 9, 1743; 2; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 9.

and vertuous, as to every Thing that looks like Gallantry, as well as the unmarried; civil and obedient to their Husbands, according to the Advice of St. PAUL: all of them courteous, affable, and obliging towards Strangers, no ways savage nor morose, no ways ungrateful, and never forgetting a good Office.”¹⁵ One cannot help but see that admiration was given to women because of their submission to men.

This Christian-type obedience is also found in *Christian History*, another magazine that began in 1743, though women were given better treatment in this periodical because of their faith and likelihood for conversion. Like the *Boston Weekly*, *Christian History* was published every week, though it lasted a little over two years in comparison to *Boston Weekly*'s one month. Perhaps religious discussion held greater interest to the general subscribing public because that public consisted of many women (considering that “many more Women were converted than Men”¹⁶), whereas the *Boston Weekly*'s disdainful tone toward women was enough to secure its demise. Also, *Christian History* may have even continued in print had it anything to print, considering its purpose was limited in the title page to its first volume: *Christian History, Containing Accounts of the Revival and Propagation of Religion in Great Britain & America*. With the First Great Awakening largely over by this point, *Christian History* set out simply to record that history.

Another magazine that began publication in 1743, and even lasted longer than *Christian History*, was *The American Magazine and Historical Chronicle*. It was distributed by various printers in cities throughout the colonies, including Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia, and thus

¹⁵ “An Account of the Indians at Carolina,” *The Boston Weekly-Magazine*, Mar 16, 1743; 3; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 17.

¹⁶ Jonathan Edwards, “[Mr. Edwards’s Account finished],” *The Christian History, Containing Accounts of the Revival and Propagation of Religion in Great Britain & America*, Mar 18, 1743; 16; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 17.

had wide-reaching audiences. This magazine opened itself to a much broader catalog of subjects than Franklin's *General Magazine*. In its first installment, the back cover listed ten subjects that would be contained in its issues, with politics and philosophy dominating the majority of articles. This does not mean that women were going to be excluded, either. For this same first volume contained "A Riddle for the Ladies," other poems directed to women readers, and a number of works specifically about women. While there is much humor within this magazine, some of which is contemptible of women, there seems to be a more balanced set of opinions. Within the first volume, one article speaks of a man enslaved to "the Marriage Chain, and hated Wife," while another speaks highly of love in marriage, arguing that "a Tenderness for the Fair Sex is the noblest Present that we have received from Heaven."¹⁷

The American Magazine, with all its variety, including many letters sent in from subscribers, is probably one of the best examples of how a magazine can serve as a guide to 1740's American culture. Tassin's view of "a disdainful calculating eye on the woman-interest" was no longer dominating the periodical.¹⁸ Rather than limiting their magazines solely to patriarchal appeal, editors chose to promote a variety of interests so as to market their periodicals to larger audiences. As explained at the beginning of this article, forty-five years before Judith Sargent Murray published "On the Equality of the Sexes" in *The Massachusetts Magazine*, an unknown author in *The American Magazine* began questioning the idea that women and men had different capacities. "Does the Mind differ with the Sex?" was the question. The author did not stop here, either, but continued:

¹⁷ "Poem 1 – No Title," *The American Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, Sep 1743; 1; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 35. "Article 4 – No Title," *The American Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, Sep 1743; 1; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 25.

¹⁸ Tassin, *The Magazine in America*, 15-16.

Is not their Reason as strong, their Memory as good, and is their Judgment less sound than ours? Experience proves them not only of equal but even of superior Faculties; and their Sex gives them greater Opportunities for Improvement; the Delicacy of their Contexture makes a sedentary Life in a Manner Essential, and the Cares of the World falling to the Man's Share, prevents a Distraction of Thought, and allows 'em greater Liberty for Speculation.¹⁹

Note that, while a woman's equality (and perhaps even superiority) is advocated, the last few lines give justification for a specific male sphere on the basis of physical difference. A woman's sphere is also outlined later in this article, when the author turns to give women advice. Rather than placing all the blame on men, however, women are seen as having encumbered themselves:

If once Ladies wou'd but look into themselves, consider their Capacities, and reflect what excellent Talents they suffer to be bury'd; if they wou'd value themselves more for their Learning than their Dress, they would have the Glory of reforming the Men, of introducing Modesty and good Sense, and of banishing Vice and Folly, the Twin-Daughters of Ignorance.²⁰

These suggestions bare striking resemblance to what Linda Kerber calls "Republican Motherhood," only instead of transmitting virtue and patriotism to their children, women could promote values and intelligence in their men.²¹ Perhaps this idea of a woman's role is best explained in Jan Lewis' vision of the "republican wife." According to Lewis, "Revolutionary-era writers held up the loving partnership of man and wife in opposition to patriarchal dominion as

¹⁹ "Remarkable Instances of the extensive Capacity of the FAIR SEX," *The American Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, Aug 1745; 2; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 344.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ For more on "republican motherhood," see Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

the republican model for social and political relationships.”²² These visions were also promoted through the use of America’s periodicals, though the roles of a republican wife seem to have been assigned over thirty years before the existence of the American Republic.

From Promotion to False Prescription

Few magazines that were released during the period between 1746 and the next ten years lasted any more than a few months. Magazines may have struggled with the outbreak of King George’s War, which was covered in the press. Also, although the Seven Years’ War did not officially start until much later, sparks were already flying as early as 1749.²³ Of the five periodicals that we have copies of from this period in the *American Periodicals Series Online*, only one seems to have lasted a full year. The *Independent Reflector* was published in New York in November 1752 and was largely aimed toward a New York readership, with articles explaining the advantages of living in the New York province in comparison to other colonies. Most of the subjects in this magazine focused mainly on religion and politics, and women were rarely mentioned. *The Occasional Reverberator*, published in 1753, was no different from the *Reflector*, beginning its first publication with a defense of the writings in the *Reflector*. Periodicals during this time seem to have been threatened either with extinction or were going the way of regional single-interest venues. Finally, in 1757, the *American Magazine and Monthly Chronicle for the British Colonies* was published, reigniting the magazine for larger markets. Like the previous *American Magazine* (1743-1746), this newer publication included a mixture of

²² Jan Lewis, “The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 44.4 (Oct 1987), 689. Interestingly, Lewis opens her explanation of the republican wife through an illustration found in 1774’s *Royal American Magazine*.

²³ The “seeds” of the war were argued to have begun in 1749 in the following article: “History of the War in NORTH-AMERICA,” *The American Magazine and Monthly Chronicle for the British Colonies*, Jul 1758; 1, 10; *American Periodicals Series Online*, pg. 507. With the war in full swing by 1758, magazines became another forum of defending English participation against alleged French aggressors.

interests, though there were fewer articles that dealt with women (in comparison to its predecessor).

One issue that remained consistent between the 1743 and 1757 magazines was the prescription for women to seek further education. In the second issue of *The American Magazine*, a poetic letter addressed “To a young Lady at a Boarding School” was printed. It presented the possibility that the image of a mother was not as glamorous as it was always made to appear. Rather than giving in to emotions and jumping into marriage, a woman should, this letter exhorts, prize and finish her education:

These passions, whether maid or wife
 Discolour all her future life.
 Nor can we conquer the disease,
 While prejudice can make it please,
 While fashion does its aid impart,
 And habit roots it in the heart.
 Dear Miss, each object learn to prize
 Divested of its gaudy dies.
 Rate not the beauty by her face,
 And view the sop without his lace.
 The wretched miser too behold,
 At distance from his bags of gold;
 And learn that beauty, wealth, and dress
 Are insubstantial happiness.²⁴

²⁴ “To a young Lady at a Boarding School,” *The American Magazine and Monthly Chronicle for the British Colonies*, Nov 1757; 1, 2; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 88.

Like other pieces that appeared in the 1740's, this poem gave advice to women to look beyond their superficial interests, like "beauty, wealth, and dress," and prescribed happiness in knowledge. Often, statements were made regarding the prejudices that kept women from such goals, but very little was done to overcome these prejudices. Women were left to their own initiatives to obtain education.

By this time, however, editors were beginning to recognize the desire of women to be included in literary interests. In 1758, the first issue of Benjamin Mecom's *The New England Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* was released with a poem presenting what its issues would contain:

OLD-fashioned Writings and select Essays,
 Queer Notions, useful Hints, Extracts from Plays,
 Relations wonderful, and Psalm, and Song,
 Good-Sense, Wit, Humour, Morals, all *ding-dong*;
 Poems, and Speeches, Politics, and News,
 What *Some* will like, and other *Some* refuse;
 Births, Deaths, and Dreams, and Apparitions too;
 With some *Thing* suited to each different *God*,
 To humour HIM and *Her*, and *me*, and YOU.²⁵

One may question why "him" and "you" are capitalized in the last line while "her" and "me" are italicized. Nevertheless, the final line places the magazine purportedly as a gender-neutral venue. Following this explanation of the magazine's contents was a section of advertisements. In addition to a request for an apprentice is an appeal for submissions from "Any *Writers* who may

²⁵ "Cover 1 – No Title," *The New England Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, Aug 1, 1758; 1; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 0_1.

incline to publish their Sentiments in this Magazine.”²⁶ Unfortunately for her subscribers (however few there must have been), *The New England Magazine* lasted only three issues.

Despite its short life, it is noteworthy that *The New England Magazine* addressed women and female education, but even more significant that little was offered to women readers in subsequent issues. The editors spent many pages in their first issue explaining their intentions and what they hoped to accomplish. At one point, women were directly addressed:

Let it be observed also (agreeable to our Plan) that several of the *Ladies* pursue Science with Success; and others of them are desirous of improving their Reason, even in the common Affairs of Life, as well as the *Men*: yet the Characters which are here drawn, the Precepts which are here given, and the Stories which are here told, are almost universally applied to one Sex; but if any of the other shall find a Character which suits them, they may, by a small Change of the Termination, easily apply and assume it to themselves, and accept the Instruction, the Admonition, and Applause which is designed in any Piece of Writing.²⁷

Recognizing that women could engage in multiple forms of education beyond household learning was not enough for the paper to succeed. The universal sex to which the articles were addressed was male. With over six dozen articles in its three publications, rarely were women mentioned or even addressed. Most of the articles dealt with advice concerning male character, patriotic duties, agriculture, and politics. When women were mentioned, it was either to address the benefit to men of being married, to write a love letter to a woman who had many suitors, or

²⁶ “Advertisement 1 – No Title,” *The New England Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, Aug 1, 1758; 1; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 0_2.

²⁷ “The Design, &c.,” *The New England Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, Aug 1, 1758; 1; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 7.

to give women some simple advice: “let her be chearful, in Spite of a churlish Husband, or cloudy Weather.”²⁸ Needless to say, this magazine had little to offer women despite its own prescription that explicitly included the ladies. It was a false prescription that sought a female audience without offering any content to suit their desires. It was only after the American Revolution when women were mentioned and addressed with more frequency in magazines.

From Prescription to Publication

In the thirty-five years prior to the American Revolution, only seven periodicals lasted for at least one year. In the seven years between the Treaty of Paris and Judith Sargent Murray’s essay, there were already eight periodicals that were published for one or more years. Not only were references to women in these seven years used four times as often as the earlier thirty-five year period, but women were given far more praise and less disdain than they had previously received in print. Also, far more women authors appear in these later magazines, such that post-Revolutionary periodicals not only gained the ears but also the voices of women. Recognizing their value as subscribers, editors not only prescribed their magazines to both women and men but published them as magazines for both sexes.

In 1784, *The Gentleman and Lady’s Town and Country Magazine*, the first specifically titled gender-neutral periodical in America, was published. Women were encouraged to send in their correspondence and participate fully in the magazine. In the July issue of that year, A.B. wrote the following: “Gentlemen, I am one of those unhappy young women whom fortune favoured with a husband; but not long after the conjugal rites were ended, he, void to all

²⁸ The three articles mentioned are the following: “The Fire-Side,” *The New England Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, Mar 1, 1759; 3; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 57. “An honest Love-Letter,” *The New England Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, Oct 1, 1758; 2; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 52. “The Symptoms and Cure of the VAPOURS,” *The New England Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, Mar 1, 1759; 3; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 46.

humanity, left me and went and married a second wife.” A.B. gave no further details of her disappointing relationship to avoid being “tedious,” but she presents three questions for anyone to answer: “1. As my husband married first, whether or no I can by the law marry afterwards, during his life? 2. Or if it is felony in the wife then, was it not felony in the husband first? 3. Or if there was ever any precedent of such case: if there was, when and where?”²⁹ Recalling A.B. who wrote the poem in Franklin’s *General Magazine* in 1741, we can see similarities but also differences in these two approaches to marriage. While the 1741 article positioned marriage as a state of subservience, the author encouraged women to remain satisfied with their lot in life. By 1784, another A.B. wrote of women’s plight, though she was not content with capitulation. Whether she was simply asking for legal advice or sarcastically criticizing a double standard in society, her questions, at the least, implicitly challenged male-favoritism.

The Columbian Magazine, which lasted close to four years in publication, became a favorite for women to send in their thoughts. On April 18, 1787, a woman by the pen name of Nitidia wrote a letter to the editor decrying previously printed ridicule of women and their household chores, particularly white washing. “It is the attention and assiduity of the women that prevent men from degenerating into swine.—How important then are the services we render—and yet for these very services we are made the subject of ridicule and fun—base ingratitude—nauseous creatures!”³⁰ Nitidia was not challenging her role as a housewife or mother, but rather the supposed superiority of men and their lack of appreciation for women’s contributions in the home. Through magazines, these complaints gained larger audiences than ever before. Though initially printed in *The Columbian Magazine*, this particular letter was reprinted in *Worcester*

²⁹ A.B., “Article 3 – No Title,” *The Gentleman and Lady’s Town and Country Magazine; or, Repository of Instructions*, Jul 1784; 3; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 116.

³⁰ Nitidia, “From the Columbian Magazine, printed at Philadelphia,” *Worcester Magazine ... Containing Politicks, Miscellanies, Poetry, and News ...*, Jun 1787; 3, 12; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 145.

Magazine, as many periodicals regularly borrowed from each other. Wherever these works appeared, they often encouraged the ideals of the republican wife and mother that the scholars previously mentioned had discussed.

While the previous letter was obviously sent by a woman, some letters promoting the idea that virtue and knowledge could spread through society through women could have been penned by either sex. Following a detailed explanation of the various marriage practices across the globe, a “Friend to the Fair Sex” wrote of the “elevated situation” of American marriages and concluded with the following: “Women, let it be observed, are always allowed the greatest privileges, where they are the most esteemed for their virtue and sentiment; and therefore the cultivation of those domestic qualities, which adorn the wife and the mother, should be a leading object in female education: with these a woman cannot fail to encrease the happiness of a good husband, and to reform the disposition of a bad one.”³¹ While her education was tied to her role as a wife and mother, women were increasingly becoming a central figure in the making of a new nation. It is clear that the Revolution had created a new society, but as that society was allegedly run by “the people,” authors were concerned with the roles that each person would play, including women.

Not everyone was content with assigning women a type of republican influence over her husband and children. In a letter filled with advice regarding a man’s choosing a woman as his wife, Benedict warns readers of the *Columbian Magazine* “that the *notable house-wife* (as she is called) makes the most mutinous wife in the world. She is bred up with high notions of her capacity, and of the great importance she is to a family; that the whole welfare of it depends

³¹ A Friend to the Fair Sex, “To the Editor of the Columbian Magazine,” *The Columbian Magazine (1786-1790)*, Jun 1787; 1, 10; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 491.

upon her care and frugality, that her husband, no doubt, would often have been ruined, had not Providence sent him so careful a guardian.”³² In this letter, a woman “of wit and fine reading” is seen as a threat in her claims of superiority over men while a “sensible” woman “yields up her own judgment to the stronger mind.”³³ This letter could hardly have been written without an actual experience where a woman had asserted her value and intellectual contribution. By publishing both positive and negative ideas regarding “the notable house-wife,” magazines were giving voice to the gender revolution. The battle of the sexes was launched, and magazines were her (and his) battlefields.

Women did not sit idly by as men denounced them, either. Periodicals gave women the chance to turn the tables of criticism. In a letter to *The New-Haven Gazette, and the Connecticut Magazine*, Lucy Prattle spoke of how “the taste of the ladies is a perpetual subject of raillery among gentlemen, and, I fear, in too many instances, very justly. But our taste is exercised principally on the article of dress, which is so perfectly arbitrary, right or wrong, just as the whim of the hour shall dictate, and every day changing, that it is not surprising we should frequently err.” She then proceeded to criticize what she perceived as the taste of gentlemen, not in dress but in architecture. With so many men insisting on building their own structures rather than purchasing homes, Prattle points out how architecture lasts much longer than fashion and should, therefore, be given much better attention. “Would it not be well for the gentlemen to spend half an hour in consulting propriety, to avoid those absurdities in articles which are to last for life?”³⁴

³² Benedict, “To the Editor of the Columbian Magazine,” *The Columbian Magazine (1786-1790)*, Jun 1787; 1, 10; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 473.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Lucy Prattle, “For the New-Haven Gazette,” *The New-Haven Gazette, and the Connecticut Magazine*, Sep 25, 1788; 3, 38; American Periodicals Series Online, pg. 0_1.

The fact that the editors of this magazine allowed her stinging evaluation of men shows their interest in having an audience of both sexes.

Conclusion

When the history of the United States is being written, scholars often seek to uncover and explain changes that occurred in American society and culture following the American Revolution. By looking at the images and icons editors chose in presenting their magazines to the public, it is clear that, as *American Periodicals* explains, “Early magazines were also anxious to stake a relationship, typically a fawning one, to the British magazines that were the models (and usually primary source material) for the colonial periodicals.... After the Revolution,” the article continues, “a new set of nationalistic icons present themselves, promising (often beyond the capacity of the editors to deliver) original content and claiming for themselves a role in the definition and defense of an American culture.”³⁵ The American Revolution became a means whereby one culture was replaced with another, at least in principle. Beyond the obvious change from British loyalty to American nationalism, however, is the way in which the periodical placed the role of women into the limelight, allowing them to express themselves in ways never before seen. Rather than the American Revolution being the catalyst for change, perhaps it was simply the production of magazines that enabled women to start questioning their unequal position in American society. Given the need for subscribers, magazine editors also had no choice but to print what the masses desired. What many women desired was change: perhaps not a complete restructuring of society, but a change that gave them value in a male-dominated world. The magazine gave women the means to replace one culture with another, at least in principle.

³⁵ “From the Periodical Archives: Magazine Mastheads, Icons and Branding, 1741-1899,” *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 14.2 (2004), 264-265.

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