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“Happy Housewives”: Sisters in the Struggle for Women’s Rights

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Abstract & Keywords

“Happy Housewives”: Sisters in the Struggle for Women’s Rights” discusses social advancement from the perspective of an often unacknowledged group of people, the domestic and motherly “happy housewives”, who played a unique and unexpectedly important role in the progress of the Women’s Rights Movement in the 19th century. This paper argues that the women who prescribed to the ideology of separate spheres—that man had his place in society and woman had hers in the home—though often belittled, were essential to the progress of the Women’s Rights Movement. While outspoken suffragettes paraded the streets and outwardly protested for women’s rights, the “happy housewives” expanded women’s influence and societal distinction in subtle but significant ways that changed women’s role in the United States forever. Primary sources that support this claim include personal accounts and letters from “happy housewives”, sermons on the subject of women’s role in society, articles published in ladies’ magazines by and for the “happy housewives”, speeches, newspaper publications, cookbooks, and teachers’ guides.

Keywords: Women’s Rights Movement, domestic sphere, ideology of separate spheres, women’s role, Industrial Revolution, United States

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“Happy Housewives”: Sisters in the Struggle for Women’s Rights

HIST 586

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April 23, 2016

The home at the turn of the 20th century is often characterized by warmth—a fire in the hearth, children’s quiet noises coming from the nursery, and a gentle, kindly-looking mother with a toddler at her hip who is pulling a fresh loaf of bread from the oven. The home was a sacred, benevolent haven of hospitality and comfort set apart from the world outside. Seemingly free from the tumult of the times—the grit and grime of the Industrial Revolution, the political turmoil of a conflicting nation, and the rise of protestors demanding civil reform—the untouched and pure warmth of the home was what made it such a sacred realm.

For every bit that the home remained untouched and pure, those who kept it that way were even more so. Most women devoted their every day within their sacred realm to stoking the fires both in their hearths and in the moral characters of their children. They possessed “a moral beauty” which gave them “a rank in creation a little lower than the angels,” and because of this distinct kind of goodness, they happily restricted their lives to the safe simplicity of the home and remained set apart from the forbidden world outside their windows.¹ However, in spite of this, they were to change that outside world in ways no one else could have done.

The Women’s Rights Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is commonly recollected as a whirlwind of protests and marches organized by women, for women. These women, often called the “suffragettes”, are the poster people for women’s suffrage. In fact, the women’s rights revolution is often portrayed as having been carried exclusively on the backs of these women and these women alone. It would seem that the radical women of the movement who did things like rally in the streets and chain themselves to

the White House fence in demand of social change are credited with the success of the Women's Rights Movement. However, as with many things in history, such an all-encompassing assumption would be far too simple. While the radical suffragettes made great strides on the public stage towards women's equality, a surprisingly large and quiet population was behind the scenes making things happen: the "happy housewife". These upper to middle-class women were the more self-effacing activists, advocating for women's rights from their position in the home by appealing to the ideology of separate spheres that society favored and that they themselves preferred. This paper will argue that although their contributions are often ignored, the support of the "happy housewives" who worked for women's equality inside the traditional "woman's sphere" was essential to the success of the Women's Rights Movement.

The movement to grant women the opportunities allegedly afforded to all Americans—such as involvement in government and being allowed to get a college education—took the country by storm and sparked a revolution that would continue on through the decades to the present day. Most modern literature about the Women's Rights Movement regards it as a wild affair, presenting a spirited revolution whose outspokenness and force were what shaped the new age of female independence. While forthright advocates like Harriet Beecher Stowe and Alice Paul did indeed shape the nation's future with their courage and fervor to go against what was expected of them in the women's sphere, all too often the women who did remain within that sphere are wrongly left out of the story. If they had neglected to contribute to the movement at all, it would be prudent to disregard them, but—like the famous women activists

of their time—many of them actually had a profound impact on the advancement of women’s rights in the United States. Authors of popular history are often remiss when it comes to acknowledging the contributions of these women. These less boisterous advocates worked for the same rights as the flag-flying suffragette, though their platform was almost the opposite. While the suffragettes argued that women should not be limited by their traditionally domestic sphere and would do well to abandon it altogether, the “happy housewives” argued that women should be in possession of more freedoms so that they could thrive within it. Both sides were often at odds with one another, either group claiming that the other was either too passionate or not passionate enough. In spite of these differences in perspective, both sides played essential roles in the movement as they often inadvertently expounded upon one another’s actions towards change. Neither side could have progressed without the other.

In order to understand why the “happy housewives” were essential to the movement, it is crucial to understand the lens through which the world viewed them and the way that they viewed themselves. Women during the latter half of the 19th century were charged with completing household tasks like doing laundry, keeping house, and caring for children both physically and spiritually. It was very important that women do their duties well, as their tasks had direct impact on their offspring who were to make up the coming generation.²

Traditionally, society tended to belittle women’s work, deeming it “minimal” and meaningless, and it wasn’t until the onslaught of the Women’s Rights Movement that this perception began to change.³ Towards the end of the 1800s, women were beginning to be regarded as something

like “moral beacons” who existed not only to dutifully perform household chores, but also to instruct children in the ways of living a good, Christian life.⁴ Women’s chief function had long been in the home, and their role was viewed as “God-given” by society with the aid of the teachings of the Christian church.

In 1845, Boston preacher Joel Hawes gave a sermon entitled, “*A Looking-Glass for Ladies,*” Or the Formation and Excellence of the Female Character, in which he highlighted the “amiable qualities of the female sex.” These qualities were summed up to be “[t]he honorable station assigned to woman at her creation [which is to be] a help-meet for man...and to make a family.”⁵ Hawes’s sermon was hardly the only one of its kind. Preachers in pulpits across the nation, such as Reverend Joseph Schuen in New York and Reverend Frederic Marvin in Oregon, were giving similar messages to the women of their congregations, imploring them to see that to serve within the domestic sphere was, in essence, part of a woman’s DNA.⁶ A Bible passage popularly decontextualized and presented by preachers to justify the attitudes towards women the 19th century was 1 Timothy 2:11-12, which reads: “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.”⁷ In many cases, these pastors were preaching to the choir, so to speak, because many women were already inclined to wholeheartedly agree with them. Though the term “happy housewife” was not put to liberal use until 1963 when Betty Friedan coined the phrase in her famous publication, *The Feminine Mystique*, it was a

term used to describe women such as these—women who were not merely content with their role in the home, but adamant that it was where they belonged.⁸ They were certain that it really was their God-given duty to maintain upright homes, cater to their husbands, and rear godly children.

However, being satisfied with their homemaker roles did not mean that they were satisfied with every aspect of their daily lives. For the vast majority of them, it was quite the contrary and, in fact, frequently a “deprivation and devastation of spirit.”⁹ As the women’s rights activists continued to rally in the streets, the women who remained quietly in the domestic sphere were beginning to grow frustrated with their lack of freedom. They were expected to play an allegedly pivotal role in raising the next generation of Americans, but they were denied the fundamental rights to do things such as vote, work outside the home for fair wages, and get a college education.¹⁰ From a “happy housewife’s” perspective, these social hindrances could not stand unopposed for much longer. “Domesticated women” began to see the value in possessing more freedom within the context of their nurturing role: they could stretch the influence of their domestic sphere beyond only motherhood. Thanks to encouraging works like that of Friedrich Fröbel, renowned pedagogical teacher of the 19th century, the “happy housewives” were beginning to understand what more they could do to expand their freedom and moral influence. Fröbel, the founder of early childhood education and a renowned German transcendentalist, did not perceive men to be as well-equipped as women for the task

of teaching children and maintained that “as educators of mankind, the women of the present time have the highest duty to perform, while hitherto they have been scarcely more than the beloved mothers of human beings.”¹¹ In other words, they were capable of extending their moral and nurturing influence far beyond the four walls of the home and into the world around them, for there are always children to be cared for and taught, even if they are not one’s own. It should, Fröbel later argues, be a woman’s duty to care for as many children in need as they are able.

In her work, *Woman’s Sphere Not Limited to Four Walls but Infinite*, Amalie Hofer, a “happy housewife” and pioneer of American kindergarten teaching, became one of the first in an ever-growing group of women to encourage others within the domestic sphere to realize their potential. “Woman [must access] the key to child culture,” Hofer argued, “that she might truly be mistress of her alleged ‘sphere.’”¹² However, it was not enough to acknowledge that these “happy housewives” were capable of much more. It also needed to be recognized that, as Margaret Fuller put it, “if we admit as truth that Woman seems destined by nature... for the inner circle, we must [acknowledge] that the arrangements of civilized life have not been, as yet, such as to secure it to her.”¹³ The state of society was not then allowing for women to extend their influence beyond the home. The “happy housewives” known for their subservience and meekness would need to find a way to push the boundaries of the restrictive sphere they had been brought up in. The challenge therein was pushing the boundaries in such

a way that the ideology of separate spheres remained completely uncompromised. It was imperative that the woman's sphere stay intact and utterly separate from the man's sphere.¹⁴

In the language of the 19th century, man's sphere was described as being "aggressive, competitive, and sexual", the opposite of the woman's sphere.¹⁵ Woman's sphere was nurturing, pious, and pure with the idea being that women were given their role to counterbalance the unfeeling and easily corruptible nature of men. William Alcott, author of *The Young Man's Guide*, argued that women were created by God to "preserve a young man from contaminations of low pleasures and pursuits" and also maintained that "when we are near [women], [they raise] us above those sordid and sensual considerations which hold such sway over men."¹⁶ Women were revered as moral catalysts, but at the price of being disallowed many of the freedoms men possessed.¹⁷ The logic used to justify the confining of women to the domestic sphere, however, was precisely the logic the "happy housewives" used to lobby for more freedom.

For centuries, a woman's chief goal was to take care of those immediately related to her. Her family was, and still would be, her primary focus through the "happy housewives" advocacy. However, with the rise of industrialism, poorer living conditions and a wide array of under-paying and dangerous jobs also became more common. It became apparent that, as the industrialized cities got filthier, the population grew denser, and the orphan count climbed higher, someone needed to step up and take care of the community. Historian Suzanne

Schrems argues that women justified their increasing “move into what was traditionally men’s domain by believing that women’s special qualities could help solve some of the nation’s problems.”¹⁸ The “happy housewife” advocates made their debut, turning out to be a fairly large behind-the-scenes group which saw the needs of those around them and sought to fill them while simultaneously pursuing their own freedoms within the domestic sphere.

Women in the domestic sphere banded together to begin their ascent into public life because it was a task that could not be accomplished alone. Though the “happy housewives” of the 19th century often remained in their homes, they were able to do a fair amount of socializing with other women at gatherings called women’s clubs—groups that met weekly at one another’s houses often to constructively sew, play music, and read poetry together.¹⁹ These meetings, though a refreshing time of comradery spent away from the usual mundanity of the home, were ultimately unfulfilling for many. It was at these meetings that women began to talk among themselves about their experiences within the home sphere, and they started to agree with the increasingly public notion that women deserved more freedom than they were receiving.²⁰ However, while the suffragists were parading the streets, demanding social equality free from the domestic sphere, the “happy housewives” believed that women’s freedoms should be granted within their home sphere on the, as Eileen Boris phrased it, “basis of their work as—rather than their mere being—mothers” and on the basis of all they could do with the motherly gifts that they believed came exclusively with being a woman.²¹

Though still very certain that they were in the sphere best suited for womankind by remaining in the home, the “happy housewives” began to look at the waning state of society around them. With the shift from agriculture to industry came new challenges that the country was not prepared to overcome. Urbanization was something entirely new. People were flooding from farms into cities because that was where the jobs were. With such a magnificent spike in migration, there was not enough housing to accommodate everyone, so people made due with what little they had. Conditions worsened as city populations rose, and the “happy housewives” began to take notice. Men, women, and children were dying because of the harsh conditions. Sickesses and respiratory illnesses like “brown lung disease” struck often since factory workers, for hours on end, breathed in the fumes that poured from machines into poorly-ventilated work rooms.²² Children, if not working in the factories themselves, were left to roam the streets while their parents or guardians worked upwards of twelve hours a day. In the eyes of the women watching from the home sphere, no one seemed to be doing anything about it. This was their chance to prove themselves and to change society for the better. Society did not disapprove of these new notions, as the world around them could undoubtedly use “a woman’s touch.” However, it was not so simple. At the command of the structure of the ideology of separate spheres, the “happy housewives” seemed to have to “earn” the right to participate in public affairs by demonstrating why it was a good thing to do within their own domestic sphere.²³ The rhetoric among them, therefore, continued to be such of subtle persuasion as they inched their way into society by demonstrating what they were capable of.

Though women did not have an official political voice at the turn of the century, they frequently utilized the impact their ladies' groups could have on the society surrounding them, and began to discuss social issues within their groups in order to figure out how best to address them.²⁴ The matter of public health was of great concern for the "happy housewives" who saw the well-being of the less fortunate as something they, as women—as future or otherwise already established wives and mothers—were directly connected to. The "happy housewives" believed that it was their female duty to come to the rescue of those living in the grime of the cityscape because they most fervently believed that it was a woman's duty to nurture and help. What started off as a duty reserved almost always exclusively for a woman within her own home rapidly developed into a concern for the public which involved inevitably political contribution.²⁵ In her work, *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, published in 1842, Catharine Beecher—sister of famed activist Harriet Beecher Stowe—implored "American women [to passively] feel an interest in the support of the democratic institutions of their Country... Who [else]," she continued, "shall take the higher road, and who the subordinate, stations in social and civil life?"²⁶

The answer, "happy housewives" concluded, was that there was no one else. It was up to women to do the job well and help to administer sufficient care for society's underprivileged children and families. Jane Addams, founder of Hull House, remarked to a women's club she had been invited to attend that society used to dictate that a woman "was supposed to have no

duties save those to her own [family],” but that those days were over given the circumstances of the present, and now a “more democratic notion of life and a larger conception of duty induces the modern woman to a recognition of what we may call the social claim to perform other duties in addition to those of her family life.”²⁷ In other words, the days of confining women to the home had to be over because there was too much outside of it that needed to be improved. There were so many lives that needed to be touched by woman’s nurturing, guiding light that women simply had to be allowed the freedom to enter into society. Addams, while too publicly involved to be considered one of the “happy housewives” herself, certainly worked with many of them to stretch the domestic sphere to the public one. Addams and the members of her various ladies’ groups worked tirelessly to clean up the streets of Chicago, disposing of garbage, sweeping, and organizing a safe house where people of little means (namely European immigrants) could get food and a simple education.²⁸ The establishment of this safe haven for the less fortunate resulted in an undeniable public display of women’s capabilities to nurture beyond the reach of the home, and began to fuel the pursuit of women’s rights as more equal and participatory citizens of the country. For example, “happy housewife” partner to Hull House was Julia Lanthrop who, for her work with orphaned children and struggling families at Hull House, was granted a position on the Illinois Board of Charities in 1890 where she was given the task of inspecting institutions for the sick, insane, and homeless.²⁹ Later, in 1912, Congress created the Children’s Bureau in the Department of

Commerce and Labor and appointed Lanthrop the head of it, making her the first woman given authority over a federal agency.³⁰

Women also began to take action in matters that, in many cases, had yet to be addressed by anyone in the public sector or government operation. Pollution, garbage build-up, and the lack of adequate means to dispose of human waste were generating despicable living conditions and lethal sicknesses and diseases such as cholera. Trash, filth, and even the dead carcasses of carriage horses piled up on the city streets, altering not only the already unstable health conditions of the turn of the century, but also the landscape.³¹ Waste and garbage were often compacted so tightly that it became the street itself, firm enough to build lean-to homes upon and immense enough to alter a once flat side street into a steep one. Many children perished due to the bacteria-ridden filth that polluted the streets in which they played during the day or of digestive infections because of the toxic water supply, and these things were of such a common occurrence that they were not dealt with for a long time.³² The “happy housewives,” in fact, were some of the first to recognize that such a severe state of uncleanliness could not go on and that immediate action needed to be taken to better the lives of those inhabiting the urban “trash boulevards”. Many began to do this by extending their usual and sphere-approved arms of charity to these families. They baked food and provided blankets to households lacking those things as they eased their way into expanding their sphere outside of the more traditional realm, embracing new challenges with their “womanly”

expertise. Gradually, though opposed to women's encroachment upon the man's sphere, the "happy housewives" began to shoulder burdens that rested outside of the customary home sphere such as attacking the problem of filth and trash in the city streets.³³

One instance in particular was tremendously instrumental in furthering women's expansion of the domestic sphere into society, and represented other similar scenarios occurring around the country towards the end of the 19th century. This critical event took place in New York City in 1884 when a group of "happy housewives" from the same women's society collected together and travelled down through the muck to investigate city sanitation circumstances for themselves.³⁴ There they found a festering 20,000 ton pile of horse manure that a man had been collecting from the streets and was reselling to farmers as fertilizer. This was the turning point for these women who deemed such an unsightly thing as something very, to put it lightly, "unhealthful [which] constituted a nuisance," and they were determined to take action.³⁵ They took extensive notes on the conditions of the streets and living quarters in the surrounding neighborhood and began to formulate a plan of action. These women wasted little time in presenting the evidence and their improvement plans to the local government. Felix Adler, founder of the 19th century Ethical Culture movement and influential rabbi at Temple Emmanuel in New York proclaimed that these women were "courageous" and remarked that "the ladies had yet to learn... the power they controlled..." and credited them with the "permanence" of the "movement against nuisances"—in other words, the rubbish that littered the streets.³⁶ With the gratitude of prominent local figures and the appreciation of local

government, these “happy housewives” then were not only granted permission but encouraged to form the sanitation improvement organization, the Ladies Health Protective Association, whose mission it was to “protect the people living in the neighborhood.”³⁷ This fit very well with the ideology of the woman’s sphere and also began to prove to the nation that women were capable of taking charge of important municipal responsibilities.

In addition to their advancements in the cleaning up of society, “happy housewives” also began to cultivate ideas about women’s education within the context of the woman’s sphere and the betterment of their societies. Many young, single “happy housewives” took whatever womanly work they could in order to support themselves prior to marriage, and this often included teaching young children in local schoolhouses. These women were happily regarded “as the paragon of moral virtue” and whose “role[s were] defined as being moral and loving teachers, supervised and managed by male principals and superintendents.”³⁸ “Happy housewife” teachers, in whose plans it had always been to have children of their own, were more than content to embrace the idea that their nurturing nature could best thrive under the administrative management of their male counterparts who often taught in and maintained schools while in possession of, unlike women, a college education. “Happy housewife” and transcendentalist founder of the United States kindergarten system, Elizabeth Peabody, wrote that, “hundreds of pupils of [kindergarten classes] have proved that any fairly gifted, well-educated, genial-tempered young woman” can become an effective teacher and further remarked that “nothing short [of that description] will do.”³⁹ With a transcendentalist

perspective—a German ideology of self-betterment through learning and engaging with nature—Peabody introduced revolutionary ideas of play and artistic expression into children’s education. Sister of notable education reformists, Sophia and Mary Peabody, Elizabeth differed from them in the particular importance she placed on maintaining the woman’s sphere and repeatedly put women’s education in the context of that sphere.⁴⁰ Maintaining that “the ideal mother’s love is the science of education,” Ms. Peabody subtly advocated for women’s place in the realm of higher education with the idea that women could improve the lives of the children in their societies if they had a more comprehensive knowledge.⁴¹ She reasoned that women educators, by improving themselves through earning college degrees, could thusly improve the lives of the children they were teaching, transforming them into engaged and thoughtful citizens who would go on to better their world.⁴² It was through public praise and implementation of her in-depth writings and reformed educational processes that Elizabeth, a “happy housewife” by definition, gained a foothold for women’s inclusion in higher education.

Many activists for the Women’s Rights Movement, however, more often than not saw little value in the way that these “happy housewives” were quietly reforming the world around them. For example, noteworthy women’s rights activist, Laura De Force Gordon, was livid at the idea that women could sit apparently idly by without standing up for themselves or the rights that they, as people and citizens of the United States, deserved. She remarked in a famous speech given in 1884, “Those who are so much concerned about women remaining in a certain sphere... and [who are] so earnest in their appeals and demands that she should accept

[her place there], ought to learn something from experience.”⁴³ The “experience” to which Gordon refers is the experience of freedom from the woman’s sphere. In her speech, Gordon maintains that the “conservative, repressive training of the home” together with woman’s “[occupation in] an inferior place in her family, [it is no] wonder that [she and] her children have grown up with an idea of woman's weakness.”⁴⁴ Gordon, like many other activists, viewed the “happy housewife” as weak, uneducated, and an ineffective member of society. However, activists and housewives were working more closely together for a more similar cause than they realized. For example, Elizabeth Peabody, previously mentioned, spoke about the importance of education reform for children alongside Margaret Fuller—a very prominent, outspoken, and well-educated women’s rights activist—in the first women’s transcendentalist club.⁴⁵ Though the two shared differing views on the ideology of the woman’s sphere, they came together for causes that they believed in: the betterment of children’s education and discussion of transcendentalist beliefs. The two women discussed ideas and thoughts with one another, either playing a vital but very different role in the furthering of women’s place in society. Peabody wrote about her findings in the kindergarten schools and devoted much of her life to teaching children, and activists like Fuller were largely the ones who gave Peabody’s thoughts publication and notability. However, not all cases were like Peabody’s. Rarely did the “happy housewives” and women’s rights activists work cooperatively side by side. Often, any unity between women with such drastically different standpoints was unintentional and

occasionally born out of situations from which stemmed two externally very conflicting opinions.

An example of such a situation was the relationship between the Beecher sisters. On the activist end of the spectrum resided Harriet Beecher Stowe who is famous for her abolitionist book *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and for her passionate activism in the abolition and women's rights movements. Harriet, along with the famed suffragists of her time, is credited with much of the triumph of the movement.⁴⁶ However, lesser known but no less important was her older sister, Catharine Beecher, who remains the very picture of a "happy housewife". Born ten years apart, the two sisters grew up under the passionate guidance of the reformist father, Lyman Beecher, and emerged into adulthood believing similarly in the necessity of the expansion of women's rights, though both differed greatly in their views of the ideology of separate spheres.

In the mid-1800s, while Harriet was facing social opposition as she made waves travelling the country advocating for abolition of slavery and women's right to vote, Catharine was at home doing what "happy housewives" tended to do: subtly affecting change from the domestic sphere.⁴⁷ She spent her days writing about the importance of children's health, the significance of cleanliness in the home, and the ways in which women should improve their society from their rightful place as women. She also advocated, as Elizabeth Peabody did, for the importance of women's education with the mindset being better able to equip children with the knowledge and morals that would enable them to thrive within their respective spheres.⁴⁸ Catharine did not approve of her sister's activism and maintained that it was not at all an

appropriate for a woman. She believed so strongly that Harriet was in the wrong that she wrote a pointed publication urging women to refrain from activism because “it was designed that [a woman’s] mode of gaining influence and of exercising power should be altogether different [from men’s] and peculiar.”⁴⁹ Harriet responded in kind by steadfastly urging women forward with her in unconcealed action, especially in regards to slavery, saying things like, “What can the *women* of a country do? O women of the free States! What did your brave mothers do in the days of the Revolution? Did not liberty in those days feel the strong impulse of woman’s heart?”⁵⁰

Though it appeared in contrast with the actions of her sister that Catharine was making no strides in the face of national turmoil, she was opening new doors for women in the ways of educational opportunities. At twenty-three after concluding that women needed to be educated in the “merciful and good” nature of God to better enable them to be the nurturers they were born to be, Catharine moved to Hartford and did the unthinkable for a woman in the 19th century: she threw herself wholly into the “happy housewife” belief that women were born cultivators of faith and founded the small and modest Hartford Female Seminary. She maintained that this move was something that fit perfectly with women’s role, deeming it an essential part of a woman’s “sphere of usefulness.”⁵¹ Overshadowed by the achievements of her sister, few discuss this accomplishment, though it was the subject of much disapproval at the time. It was very important to Catharine Beecher that society recognize women’s capabilities and need to be educated, and her school became one of the first institutions that

prepared women for organizing and managing the newly emerging finishing schools for young girls.⁵²

Though Harriet and Catharine had different perspectives on women's role in society, both simultaneously made important strides for women's advancement. While Harriet, with a loud voice, stood up and demanded justice across the nation, Catharine worked quietly to develop women's roles not only as educated people but as authority figures in educational institutions. Eventually, the two sisters settled down in their old age, and in 1869, after the Civil War had ended, Harriet and Catharine co-wrote and published a book for ladies entitled *The American Woman's Home* in which they wrote on the "maintenance of economical, healthful, beautiful, and Christian homes."⁵³ They came together to compile a work that advised women on the interworkings of successful homes and successful womanhood, encouraging all women—in spite of their differences—to understand their value and that their position in society as wives and mothers was an honorable one. They write in the introduction, "It is the aim of this volume to elevate both the honor and the remuneration of all the employments that sustain the many difficult and sacred duties of the family state, and thus to render each department of woman's true profession as much desired and respected as are the most honored professions of men."⁵⁴ There are few more gallant things than to start as women separated by very opposing views and then to conclude together as both sisters by blood and as sisters in the struggle for women's rights.

While women's rights activists like Harriet Beecher Stowe focused on giving women their voice, the "happy housewives" made it their goal to better society with what had always been defined as their womanly, nurturing nature, proving to the world through benevolent action that women, stepping nary a toe outside of their domestic sphere, were capable of greater things. The "happy housewives" used their domestic experience and natural inclinations to care for others and to better the world around them, thereby adding fuel to the progressing flames of the Women's Rights Movement through subtlety and charity. While many would argue that the candid and bold suffragettes were the drivers of the Women's Rights Movement in the United States, there was much going on behind the veil of the domestic sphere that few discuss but which had a profound impact on the way the movement progressed. Together, both groups played vital roles in opening doors of opportunity for American women and demonstrating their capabilities to a society that had previously yet to recognize them.

Endnotes

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- ⁵ Hawes, 6.
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- ⁸ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1963.
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- ¹¹ Friedrich Fröbel, *Educational Laws for All Teachers*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1897.
- ¹² Amalie Hofer, "Woman's Sphere Not Limited to Four Walls but Infinite." *The Woman's Standard*, 1892, 9, sec. 3.
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