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Women and the Practice of Studio Portraiture in Britain 1888 – 1914: Politics, Commerce and Constructions of Femininity

Georgina Rose Mind

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

This research was carried out in collaboration with the National Portrait Gallery

October 2021

Abstract

This thesis recuperates women's photographic production in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Britain, specifically the commercial practice of studio portraiture. It addresses a gap in scholarship, namely the absence of women photographers in social histories of photography, and the lack of attention paid to commercial photography within feminist accounts of the medium's history. I draw out the social, political and cultural significance of women's portraits of women during this period and theorise the various ways that photographs constructed femininity at a time when gendered norms were being restructured. In so doing, my thesis constructs an original social history of photography in this period from a feminist standpoint.

The thesis is structured thematically and comprises six chapters. The first chapter examines the professionalisation of the 'lady photographer' through an analysis of late-nineteenth-century periodicals aimed at a female readership. I then consider how women photographers succeeded within the masculine domain of commerce by instrumentalising aspects of the feminine ideal (as defined through Victorian domestic ideology) to soften their transgression of women's 'rightful' place in the home. Chapter three focuses on the collaborative working practices of women photographers, and how alternatives to the heteronormative status quo were envisioned through co-operative dynamics. In chapter four I consider the role of studio portraiture within the British suffrage movement and women photographers' picturing of modern, politically engaged femininity. The construction of celebrity and feminine spectacle through studio portraits is the subject of the penultimate chapter. Finally, I reflect on the process of historical research into women's agency, and the commodification of femininity in which commercial photographers participated. Key photographers examined in the thesis are Lallie Charles, Lena Connell, Alice Hughes, Rita Martin, Kate Pragnell and Alice Stewart.

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Preface

The foundations for this research were laid by Terence Pepper, Curator of Photographs at the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) from 1978 – 2014, who has spent his career championing the work of historical and contemporary women photographers. In 1994 Pepper curated a landmark exhibition at the NPG on Edwardian women photographers, which brought the then-obscure names Christina Broom, Olive Edis, Alice Hughes and Eveleen Myers to public attention. Following this, Pepper led the NPG's acquisition of a large collection of prints and negatives by the little-known photographers Rita Martin and Lallie Charles, donated by Lallie Charles Cowell, the sisters' niece, who had reached out to Pepper after reading about his 'Edwardian Women Photographers' exhibition. During his tenure at the Gallery, Pepper diversified the collection by pursuing works by female photographers and he has made substantial donations from his personal collection of works by women. Indeed, numerous objects that I discuss in this thesis formed part of Pepper's own collection before he donated them to the NPG in the interests of future research.

Pepper invested considerable time and resources into researching the lives and careers of women photographers represented in the NPG collection and locating their work elsewhere. Prior to the birth of online newspaper and periodical repositories, Pepper, with the assistance of Vivien Hamley, produced lists of publications where portraits by women were reproduced and made copies of articles about their work. The materials that Pepper sourced and collated pertaining to women photographers in the NPG collection proved to be an invaluable springboard for my research, as were the many days we spent together as I embarked on my project, when he generously shared his knowledge and expertise with me.

The curatorial approach that Pepper practices recognises the social, cultural and historical value of photographs beyond the price that they would command in the art market. His interest in ephemera and everyday objects, celebrity and popular culture, and the role of portraiture in defining identities, meant that objects that might otherwise have been overlooked by art institutions – such as theatrical postcards and magazines – and labelled domestic, folk or kitsch, were preserved. This approach strikes me as particularly feminist, one that applies an expanded concept of value and

is attuned to the subtler meanings and socio-political resonances of an image, rejecting entirely a criterion of artistic Greatness formed through masculinist standards. Without Pepper's dedicated efforts to preserve works by women photographers and expand historical understanding of their production over the past thirty years, the photographers I examine in this thesis would most likely have been forgotten entirely and their works lost or destroyed. This research is therefore heavily indebted to Pepper's legacy and has benefited immensely from his mentorship.

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First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest thanks to my supervisory team. Dr Lucy Soutter has had a profound influence on my development as a researcher over the past four years. She has patiently and faithfully nurtured my ideas (for better or worse!), inspired me to expand my thinking and been an abundant source of inspiration, strength, support, and boundless positivity. Professor David Bate provided astute guidance, excellent advice and helpful feedback on drafts, especially in relation to the process of writing a feminist history. Dr Sabina Jaskot-Gill generously and skilfully facilitated so much of my learning and work at the NPG and made everything seem possible with her formidable energy. Dr Phillip Prodger ensured that I had the very best start to doctoral research and welcomed me so warmly into the photography community.

I am grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for funding this research and to the Centre for Research and Education in Arts and Media at the University of Westminster for providing such a stimulating intellectual environment in which to carry it out. My gratitude extends to the National Portrait Gallery for granting me the support and resources to undertake this research and for all the professional development opportunities I was afforded during my placement.

I would like to express sincere thanks to the curatorial team at the National Portrait Gallery, in particular Georgia Atienza, Rosie Broadley, Clare Freestone, Rab MacGibbon, Sarah Moulden and Constantia Nicolaides, who went above and beyond to support my research.

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To my family: thank you for being the best cheerleaders! Mum and Dad – thank you for throwing the homework on the fire and taking the car downtown. Your belief in me made all this possible.

I dedicate this thesis to my partner Diarmuid Hester, who has been there for me every step of the way.

Author's Declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Introduction

What becomes 'historic' is not just a question of accident – of letters and diaries lost and conversations unrecorded – but also a question of power: not the power of open coercion, but the power invested in particular institutions and discourses, and the forms of knowledge they produce.

Lisa Tickner.¹

The Romance of a Shop, a novel by Amy Levy published in 1888, tells the story of the four Lorimer sisters, sardonically described in the language of fairy tales by one of the sisters as 'four beautiful, fallen princesses, who kept a photography shop'.² Facing poverty following the death of their father and at risk of becoming wards of various distant and hostile relatives these enterprising young women decide to set up a photography studio in the centre of London – a plan that enables them to remain together and financially independent. Levy based the characters on her friends, the radical Black sisters, and drew her scenes from real photographic studios near to her home in London.³ Levy's novel contributed to the construction of the 'New Woman', broadly defined as a liberated, feminist ideal of womanhood in the late Victorian period. Her narrative choice of a photography studio as the entrepreneurial venture that provided an alternative future for the Lorimer sisters demonstrates perspicaciously the potential for agency that the photographic profession held for women at this historical juncture.

The Romance of a Shop is remarkable for its realistic portrayal of the risks and rewards that entering the photographic industry entailed for women. Moving from the domestic, suburban space that the Lorimer sisters shared with their late father into the public, urban and commercial realm of the capital's centre, the novel stages a shift from traditional to progressive female gender roles through this traversing of spheres.⁴

¹ Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907 – 1914* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1987), p. ix.

² Amy Levy, *The Romance of a Shop*, ed. by Susan Bernstein (Plymouth: Broadview Editions, 2006), p. 90.

³ Susan Bernstein, 'Introduction', in *The Romance of a Shop*, by Amy Levy (Plymouth: Broadview Editions, 2006), pp. 11–41 (p. 27).

⁴ S. Brooke Cameron and Danielle Bird, 'Sisterly Bonds and Rewriting Urban Gendered Spheres in Amy Levy's "The Romance of a Shop", *Victorian Review*, 40.1 (2014), 77–96.

The women's newfound vocation gives their lives meaning: ""Oh Lucy", cried Gertrude, in a burst of enthusiasm as they stood together in the studio, "this is work, this is life. I think we have never worked or lived before". ⁵ By virtue of their occupation, the Lorimers are able to explore the modern city and enjoy the pleasures of independence, however their liberated lifestyle is not without obstacles. When the Lorimers' conservative relatives find out about the sisters' plan to support themselves, they proclaim them 'a set of wilful, foolish girls' and object to their venture on the grounds of 'loss of caste; damage to prospects [...] and of the complicated evils which must necessarily arise from an undertaking so completely devoid of chaperons'. ⁶ The issue of upholding feminine 'conduct' is a major concern for these elders, and the Lorimer sisters' intentions are deemed 'dangerous and unwomanly'. ⁷ The Romance of a Shop dramatises the high stakes of choosing such a lifestyle, and how skilful women photographers had to be to succeed in the masculine arena of commerce while also negotiating – and stretching – the ideological boundaries of bourgeois femininity.

The year that Levy's novel was published, 1888, was a landmark year in the history of photography, and therefore where this study begins. In September 1888 Kodak democratised photography with the release of the first camera using roll film that could be sent off for processing and printing; their slogan was, 'You press the button – we do the rest'. Amateur photography became particularly popular with women, a phenomenon that undoubtedly impacted the cultural and societal acceptance of women practicing photography professionally, as I argue in chapter one. Although male proprietors dominated the photographic industry, in the final decade of the nineteenth century the number of studios owned by women in London more than doubled. Women made up a large proportion of workers in the photographic industry more broadly as they were cheaper to employ, but 'lady photographers' who established studios and worked on their own account grew in number and gained

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⁵ Levy, p. 81.

⁶ Levy, pp. 65, 72.

⁷ Levy, p. 72.

⁸ Photography: The Whole Story, ed. by Juliet Hacking (London: Thames and Hudson, 2012), p. 101.

⁹ Bennett, R., Smith, H., van Lieshout, C., Montebruno, P., Newton, G. (2020). British Business Census of Entrepreneurs, 1851-1911. [data collection]. UK Data Service. SN:

^{8600, &}lt;a href="https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=8600">https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=8600. Thanks to Carry van Lieshout for her assistance with extracting data on women who owned photographic studios in this period.

public visibility in the 1890s. Contemporary commentators noted women's advancement in commercial photography and by 1901 the art critic Fred Miller predicted that 'much of the artistic portraiture, especially of women and children, will not before long be in the hands of women'. The fierce competition that female photographers were posing, even to long established (male-run) photography studios, as well as portrait painters, was also noted. The second commendation of the artistic portrait painters, was also noted.

The late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century practice of studio portraiture has received scant scholarly attention in general, as I explore further on in this introduction. Women's commercial photographic production has, perhaps unsurprisingly, been pushed even further into obscurity. This study firstly calls into question the value systems inherent within dominant histories of photography that are responsible for this neglect of commercial female photographers. And secondly, I argue for the historical importance of their representation of women in a period where divergent models of femininity tussled for supremacy and women's increased social and political agency was under negotiation. While exploring how the constraints and expectations of bourgeois feminine identity were navigated by women who worked as professional photographers, the thesis also engages with how they constructed femininities through their portraiture.

I engage closely with the social, political and cultural conditions of women's commercial photographic production through case studies of key photographers who began their careers in the 1890s: Lallie Charles (1869 – 1919), Lena Connell (1875 – 1949), Alice Hughes (1857 – 1939), Rita Martin (1874 – 1958) Kate Pragnell (1853 – 1905) and Alice Stewart (1862 – 1941). Rejecting an evaluative model that argues for the aesthetic merit of studio portraits, this study presents 'historical forms of explanation of women's artistic *production'* [original emphasis], in line with the methodological approach theorised by Griselda Pollock to produce 'feminist interventions' in art history. I do not seek to insert or elevate the individuals whose careers I explore into canons and chronologies formulated according to masculinist

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¹⁰ Fred Miller, 'The Artistic Work of Some Lady Photographers', *The Lady's Realm*, 1901, 336–44 (p. 336).

^{11 &#}x27;Madame Lallie Charles's Portraits', The Lady's Realm, May 1900, pp. 39–46 (p. 46).

¹² Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 27.

criteria of success or artistic importance. Instead, this thesis considers the historically specific set of social values, meanings and functions attached to commercial portraiture to reveal the impact and influence of this area of women's photographic production. In doing so, it proposes a feminist social history of photography.

Thesis remit

This thesis is the product of a collaborative doctoral partnership with the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) and the University of Westminster, therefore one of its major objectives is to contribute to institutional knowledge about the NPG's collection of studio portraits by women photographers and the consequences of their work for British social and cultural history more broadly. The NPG has provided the home and resources for this project however the thesis is not limited to an institutional survey and my research extended beyond its walls. While the NPG's holdings of studio portraits by British women photographers are unrivalled in the U.K., like any collection of historical materials it tells a partial story and is premised on certain exclusions as a result of the shifting ideologies and value systems through which it has been constituted. As the historian Antoinette Burton writes, all archives are produced by 'specific political, cultural, and socioeconomic pressures—pressures which leave traces, and which render archives themselves artifacts of history'.¹³

The fact that the NPG collection, as well as the other repositories and archives I consulted, do not identifiably feature any women photographers of colour from the period in question is evidence of the 'configurations of power', to use a Foucauldian concept, such as imperialist and racist legacies, that are entrenched within British cultural heritage institutions, especially those founded during the nineteenth century, and within the dominant culture of the period more broadly. I say 'identifiably' because it is possible that some of the women photographers in the collections I consulted were assumed to be white Europeans but actually were not. The rampant and normalised racism in Britain in the imperial era would certainly have been a major barrier for people who were Black, Asian or from other minoritised ethic groups to run

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¹³ Antoinette Burton, *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and The Writing of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 6.

successful businesses.¹⁴ Moreover, the intersections of racism and sexism would have made it especially difficult for a non-white woman to run her own photography business. That is not to say that photographers of colour in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods did not exist, only that their works and records have not been preserved, which stymies empirical research in this area.¹⁵

Information from census returns indicates that the women photographers investigated in this thesis came from middle-class backgrounds, some more affluent than others. As the father was typically the head of the household and family breadwinner in the mid-Victorian period, his occupation is therefore a reliable indicator of the family's social class. Alice Hughes likely had the most wealthy background of all the photographers I discuss, based on her father's occupation as a successful portrait painter and their ability to employ three domestic staff, including a footman, which, by 1900, only the very wealthy could afford. Lena Connell's family owned a photographic studio that she took over from her brother, who trained her; Connell then ran the business assisted by her mother and sister. Kate Pragnell's father was a 'licensed victualler', which probably meant that he owned a prosperous inn or pub, as he was able to afford to educate her. Alice Stewart was the daughter of

¹⁴ Jeffrey Green's work *Black Edwardians: Black People in Britain 1901 – 1914* (London: Routledge, 1998) has illuminated the industries where many Black people worked, but photography is not mentioned. My research in this area has revealed the barriers that Black photographers would have experienced during this period. For instance, racist attitudes of the time and the improbability of a photographer of colour being commercially successful are demonstrated by a local news item from 1900 in the *Kirkintilloch Gazette* about a local fundraising event that featured a comedic 'farce' about a 'negro' photographer (3 March 1900, p. 2). In the United States, however, portrait studios had been set up by African Americans as early as 1845. See George Sullivan, *Black Artists in Photography, 1840 - 1940* (New York: Cobblehill Books, 1996), p. 39. Cited in David Bate, *Photography: The Key Concepts,* 2nd edn (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 193.

¹⁵ Photographs and artworks of the period reveal that the Black, Asian and minority ethnic population of Britain in the nineteenth century was much larger than written records indicate, as Jan Marsh's edited collection *Black Victorians*: *Black People in British Art 1800 – 1900* (London, Lund Humphries, 2005) has shown. The National Portrait Gallery has hosted several exhibitions and displays that use portraits to explore the lives of Black, Asian and minority ethnic people in Britain during this period, for example 'Black Chronicles: Photographic Portraits 1862 - 1948' (2016) and 'Indian Nobility in Britain' (2019). However, the question still remains: who was taking the photograph?

¹⁶ Alice Hughes's household had three servants, two housemaids and a footman. *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1901*. Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives, 1901.Class: RG13; Piece: 239; Folio: 34; Page: 5; Laura Schwartz, *Feminism and the Servant Problem: Class and Domestic Labour in the Women's Suffrage Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 6.

¹⁷ Fred Miller, 'The Artistic Work of Some Lady Photographers', *The Lady's Realm*, 1901, 554–62 (p. 560). ¹⁸ *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1861*. Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives of the UK (TNA): Public Record Office (PRO), 1861. Class: RG 9; Piece: 654; Folio: 53; Page: 27; GSU roll: 542679.

a captain in the British Army.¹⁹ Lallie Charles and Rita Martin's father was a linen merchant in Ballymena, Ireland, where they emigrated from in the mid 1890s.²⁰

It's important to acknowledge that the class and social circumstances of the women discussed in this thesis played a significant role in their successes. For the most part, they opted out of the institution of marriage and worked instead to sustain their financial independence, either out of choice or necessity. The only photographer who was married while running her studio was Lallie Charles, and it is unclear how much of a role her two husbands had in her business. Her first marriage, to Georges Garet-Charles (a Frenchman whose name she adopted as her exotic nom-de-plume) was likely 'common law' as there is no official documentation of it and on her second marriage to Herbert Carr in 1905 she declared herself a spinster rather than divorced or widowed.²¹ Lena Connell also married but gave up her studio practice and adopted an entirely new name of 'Beatrice Cundy', shedding her past as a communist, suffragette and professional photographer.²² Pragnell and Stewart were both 'spinsters' who lived and worked together from 1894 to Pragnell's death in 1905, and Rita Martin remained unmarried.

Another, connected, condition that made these women's professional achievements possible is that none of them had children. A working, middle-class mother was a serious deviation from the social norms of the time, and the demands of raising a family, running a household *and* a business would have been seen as impracticable and undesirable. As motherhood historian Helen McCarthy writes about the late Victorian period: '[t]he working mother stood as a symbol of domestic and economic disorder, the antithesis of progress and civilisation'.²³ A final point on the circumstances that enabled women to become leading professional photographers is that the majority paid other women, of a lower class than them, to carry out their

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¹⁹ The National Archives; Kew, Surrey, England; Class Number: *WO 25*; Class Title: *11 Dragoons*; Piece Number: *278*; Piece Title: *11 Dragoons*.

²⁰ Lallie Charles and Herbert Carr's marriage certificate (7 Mar 1905, St Marylebone, London, England), states Charles's father's occupation as 'linen merchant'. London Metropolitan Archives; London, England; *London Church of England Parish Registers*; Reference Number: *P89/MRY1/271*²¹ Ibid.

²² Shirley Neale, 'Mrs Beatrice Cundy, Née Adelin Beatrice Connell, 1875–1949', *History of Photography*, 25.1 (2001), 61–67.

²³ Helen McCarthy, *Double Lives: A History of Working Motherhood* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), p. 3.

domestic labour.²⁴ Then, as now, the freedom and choice that one woman is able to enjoy is enabled by a system that exploits the poorer woman's lack of choice.

The demographic that these women photographers catered for was largely the upper middle classes or the aristocracy, who had the means to be photographed several times a year.²⁵ They also photographed stage performers, who, through the social mobility produced out of celebrity and consumer culture, used the currency of fame to move up the social tiers and join the elite. Connell, Martin, Pragnell and Stewart photographed women and men, but Charles and Hughes exclusively photographed women. The women that they photographed typically came from the aristocracy or the 'actressocracy', a term coined to describe the number of female stage performers who married into the peerage in the Edwardian period, and also reflects the elevated status of actresses in the popular imaginary of the time.26 Hughes, Charles and Martin all achieved the epitome of success in their careers by photographing royalty, an accolade that would have given them license to charge higher prices than the average photographer. According to her apprentice Yevonde, Charles's portrait prices in the early 1910s started at 5 guineas and went up to a staggering 30 guineas, which in today's money would equate to a price range between £634.35 – £3,697.34.27 If this is accurate it means that Charles could command unusually high rates given that her competitor, Alexander Bassano, charged significantly less at 2 guineas per sitting, even though he had been appointed the Queen's photographer in 1890.28 The photographs by Lena Connell that survive indicate that her clientele was comprised of the liberal middle class rather than the aristocracy. Perhaps due to her own socialist politics, she portrayed numerous late

²⁴ Lallie Charles and Rita Martin had one female servant: *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1901*. Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives, 1901.Class: RG13; Piece: 117; Folio: 134; Page: 18. Kate Pragnell is listed as having one female servant in 1891: *Census Returns of England and Wales, 189*, The National Archives of the UK (TNA); Kew, Surrey, England; 1; Class: RG12; Piece: 1034; Folio: 86; Page: 38; GSU roll: 6096144. Alice Stewart had one female domestic servant in 1911: Census Returns of England and Wales, 1911. Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives of the UK (TNA), 1911, Class: RG14; Piece: 3204; Schedule Number: 224.

²⁵ Ignota, 'A Lady Photographer: An Interview with Miss Kate Pragnell', *The Woman at Home: Annie S. Swan's Magazine*, 1901, pp. 667–76 (p. 674).

²⁶ 'The New "Ocracies."', Leeds Mercury, 4 September 1909, p. 4.

²⁷ Calculated using UK Inflation Calculator: GBP from 1751 to 2021." Official Inflation Data, Alioth Finance, https://www.officialdata.org/UK-inflation. [accessed 13 July 2021].

²⁸ John Plunkett, 'Alexander Bassano', ed. by John Hannavy, *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 117–18.

Victorian and Edwardian intellectuals and radicals, including Edward Carpenter and George Bernard Shaw. It was Shaw, who, having met Connell through the socialist activist Fenner Brockway, invited her to photograph him and subsequently launched her career. As chapter four shows in depth, Connell went on to photograph the leading figures of the women's suffrage movement. Pragnell and Stewart earned their living photographing Society women for the domestic women's magazine *Hearth and Home*, but their sitters also included celebrities such as actress Sarah Bernhardt and the dandy and parodist Max Beerbohm. The range of clientele that these photographers served cannot be confirmed, however, by their existing works because these have likely been preserved due to the perceived importance of the subject. It is likely that these photographers also served the aspirational middle-class, who were in a position to save for a portrait from a studio that affirmed a particular social status.

In terms of the geographical parameters of the thesis, photography studios were run by women across Britain, but the majority of those I consider operated their businesses in London. As the capital city and the commercial and cultural centre, London was the county with the most photographic studios.³¹ Especially for women photographers who exclusively photographed 'ladies', London was a prime location for their business as they could draw in wealthy women with leisure time who were travelling into central London for a day of shopping and a visit to the theatre.³²

The thesis investigates the period 1888 to 1914. Focusing on this twenty-six-year period enables me to examine one generation of female studio photographers and their constructions of femininity in detail, at a point where when women's societal position was shifting dramatically, especially as the campaign for suffrage accelerated after 1906. These women established a precedent that enabled others to train with

²⁹ Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (London and New York: Verso, 2008), p. 342.

³⁰ Copyright application form for portrait of Sarah Bernhardt by Kate Pragnell, filed at Stationers' Hall, 10 July 1903, COPY1/463/149, The National Archives, Kew; Copyright application form for portrait of Max Beerbohm by Kate Pragnell, filed at Stationers' Hall, 10 January 1903, COPY1/459/183, The National Archives, Kew.

³¹ Bennett, R., Smith, H., van Lieshout, C., Montebruno, P., Newton, G. (2020). British Business Census of Entrepreneurs, 1851-1911. [data collection]. UK Data Service. SN: 8600, https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=8600.

³² By the mid-1890s, advice to aspiring women photographers pointed out that London's photographic market was becoming saturated and that seaside towns presented better opportunities. Adeline Anning, 'A Profession for Women: Photography', *The Woman's Signal*, 7 March 1895, p. 149.

them and then open their own studios, a great example being Yevonde, who was apprenticed to Lallie Charles in the early 1910s. A further reason to end my study at the watershed of the First World War is that although several photographers I consider had careers that lasted beyond the War, British society, politics and the economy were fundamentally changed during and after it. In the 1920s a new generation of women photographers, including Yevonde and Dorothy Wilding, remoulded studio portraiture to new, modern aesthetics and manufactured a feminine desirability in line with sexually charged consumer culture. The affects of their photographs evolved out of the artifice of the previous generations' styles, but instead of conveying romanticism and nostalgia they cultivated ideals of glamour and a more overt feminine (sexual) power.

The distinctions in feminine representation pre- and post-First World War were wittily documented by Cecil Beaton in his *Book of Beauty*, published in 1930, through the symbol of the hand.³³ Beaton illustrated a series of disembodied feminine hands, engaged in a variety of activities and encased in two circles: one for pre 1914 and one post 1914 [Fig. 1]. The clear distinction between the represented femininities of the two eras is passivity and activity. For the era leading up to 1914 Beaton has drawn dainty hands that are limp at the wrist with fingers dangling, hands flopping backwards making languid, elegant motions or with fingers curled around a delicate teacup with a sophisticated little finger raised. The hands are refined and ornamental. The post 1914 illustration, by contrast, shows more dynamic arrangements: a hand holding a book, gripping a wine glass, two hands holding cigarettes. They are closed and angular, positioned with a sense of purpose and confidence that is absent from the pre 1914 hands.

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³³ Cecil Beaton, *The Book of Beauty* (London: Duckworth, 1930), p. 3.



Figure 1: Illustrations by Cecil Beaton, The Book of Beauty (London: Duckworth, 1930), p. 3.

Disciplinary position and methodology

The thesis is situated between disciplines for two reasons. Firstly, the subject matter does not naturally fit within one particular discipline. As the research deals with a form of visual culture, art history seems the most obvious major discipline that could accommodate it, however commercial photographic portraiture sits uneasily within art history firstly because of photography's tension with the category of 'fine art', and secondly due to commercial portraiture's role in popular culture and its domestic affiliations. Yet despite this awkward relationship, it is the case that an 'art-historicist bias [...] governs most contemporary discussions of the [photographic] medium', as photographer and theorist Allan Sekula identified.³⁴ In response to this, Sekula advocated an approach that analyses how photography operates within advanced industrial societies and attempts to understand 'how to read the making and reception of ordinary pictures', an idea I will return to later on.³⁵ Instead of appending scholarly

³⁴ Alan Sekula, 'Reading and Archive: Photography between Labour and Capital', in *The Photography Reader Ed. by Liz Wells* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 443–52 (p. 450).

³⁵ Sekula, p. 450. Geoffrey Batchen has also written on the absence of 'ordinary photographs' from the history of photography: Geoffrey Batchen, 'Vernacular Photographies', *History of Photography*, 24.3 (2000), 262–71 https://doi.org/10.1080/03087298.2000.10443418>.

engagement with photography to art history, he asserted that this work should be located within materialist cultural history.³⁶

The discussion about the disciplinary allegiances of the history of photography has recently been reignited. In 2020, photography historian Steve Edwards proposed that business history has far more to offer photography historians than art history, claiming that 'thinking about pictures without considering business strategies and markets makes no sense; the forms photographs take are only intelligible when we comprehend segmented markets, technological choices and labour forms'.³⁷ I agree with Edwards on this point, and my own research first and foremost analyses the *practice* of studio portraiture and contextualises its product within social history. I examine aspects such as the organisation of the studio, labour practices within it, photographers' self-fashioning and marketing, the studio portrait as a political tool and a commodity and the way it functioned within different economies. Edwards calls for a paradigm shift, suggesting that,

If as photo-historians we were to widen our purview we might recognise that the history of photography could easily include the organisation of studios and firms; the luxury end of the trade and the mass market or specialist markets; supply houses, small firms, family firms and chain stores; the division of labour (including the gendered division of labour) and the labour process; research and development; retail and marketing; investment patterns and access to finance; and the production and supply of equipment and other materials and market strategy.³⁸

My study responds to this call for a widened purview when studying photography's past, however, my objective differs from Edwards's in that I engage with commercial photography from a feminist perspective. I consider women photographers' business models, examining the social relations and spatial dynamics of their studios as well as

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³⁶ Sekula, p. 450.

³⁷ Steve Edwards, 'Why Pictures? From Art History to Business History and Back Again', *History of Photography*, 44.1 (2020), 3–15 (p. 6) https://doi.org/10.1080/03087298.2020.1827832>.

³⁸ Steve Edwards, 'Why Pictures? From Art History to Business History and Back Again', p. 5.

the strategies that they utilised to compete with men, in order to understand how these factors impacted on their production of images. Moreover, I locate points of friction between the demands of commerce and women's efforts to advance their social and political agency.

While drawing on certain art historical tools, I maintain an awareness of the limitations of the discipline as many of the classificatory, analytical and evaluative methodologies of art history are not appropriate to apply to the kind of material I examine in this thesis. For example, the art historical fetishization of authenticity and focus on the unique properties of an object would be obstructive my inquiry, which is primarily concerned with the social meanings and uses of photographs. Because of this emphasis, the thesis predominantly engages with images in reproduction, published on postcards, or in magazines, periodicals and newspapers, and interprets them as objects circulating within popular and political cultures. On this note, the paucity of extant original prints produced by women studio portraitists, compared to some 'canonical' photographers, is, I suspect, part of the reason why their work has been eclipsed in scholarship by photographers whose oeuvres are better preserved. The interconnected institutions of the art gallery and art market do not place as much value on reproductions, which, as Walter Benjamin claimed, diminish the 'aura' of a work of art.³⁹

I do, however, make strategic use of visual analysis to analyse the formal components of photographs, such as iconography and intertextual references, to interpret the social or political message being conveyed. And while I point out the skilful ways in which women photographers produced their portraits and became commercially successful, this is to reconstruct the conditions around their popularity and success within a particular social, economic, political and cultural context. I do not argue the case for these works being included in a photographic canon based on their aesthetic merits, a system which, as Griselda Pollock writes 'constitutes the objects/texts it selects as the products of artistic mastery and, thereby, contributes to

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³⁹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. by Henry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, 1968), p. 221.

the legitimation of white masculinity's exclusive identification with creativity and with Culture'. 40

The second reason this thesis is positioned between disciplines is that interdisciplinarity is key to its feminist ethos. Feminist research is defined by its criticality towards power structures and the sites and sources of knowledge production.⁴¹ It must, therefore, cross established disciplinary boundaries, occupy spaces in between disciplines and challenge the institutional tendency to gatekeep discrete subject areas. In this way it can reveal intersecting forms of inequality, oppression and erasure.⁴² As Griselda Pollock writes about the discipline of art history, as

...itself a component of cultural hegemony maintaining and reproducing dominative social relations through what it studies and teaches and what it omits or marginalizes, and through how it defines what history is, what art is, and who and what the artist is.⁴³

Pollock argues that the central task of feminist art historians is to critique the discipline's methods of writing history and its status as an 'institutionalized ideological practice' that upholds the dominant culture through its interpretations.⁴⁴

In light of these concerns, to make my arguments in this thesis I employ the tools of several disciplines to produce a hybrid methodology. First and foremost, I approach studio portraiture as a practice that was grounded in social relations and operated according to socially and politically produced ideologies. To access and understand the cultural, political and economic particularities that constructed these shifting social relations and ideologies, I use empirical, archival methods.

⁴⁰ Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desires and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 9.

⁴¹ Introducing Gender and Women's Studies, ed. by Victoria Robinson and Diane Richardson, 4th edn (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 79.

⁴² Kath Woodward and Sophie Woodward, 'Gender Studies and Interdisciplinarity', *Palgrave Communications*, 1.1 (2015), 1–5 https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2015.18>.

⁴³ Griselda Pollock, 'Women, Art and Ideology: Questions for Feminist Art Historians', *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 15.1/2 Teaching about Women and the Visual Arts (1987), 2–9 (p. 2).

⁴⁴ Pollock, 'Women, Art and Ideology: Questions for Feminist Art Historians', p. 3.

Periodicals and newspapers are the main primary sources that I consulted to locate the historically specific meanings and roles of studio portraiture within the period. I carried out an extensive study of the period's popular press in order to understand the context in which studio portraits (typically of celebrated individuals) appeared and where they are preserved through reproduction. Magazines, newspapers and periodicals provide insight into how these photographs were publicly understood, valued and consumed, the economies of desire and celebrity that they contributed to, the political resistance that they staged or their service to the status quo. The period that this study examines coincided with the proliferation of the illustrated press and the acceleration of celebrity culture and the integral part that studio portraiture played in this phenomenon has not been sufficiently theorised. Periodicals enabled me to access portraits produced by women photographers far beyond the extent of the NPG's (and other) collection(s), allowing me to form a more holistic and nuanced picture of their respective practices.

Periodicals also provided me with accounts from photographers themselves about their work and experiences as women in the male dominated photographic industry through interviews. According to historian June Purvis, 'finding out about women's daily experiences and, therefore, where possible, finding women's own words in the past is a critical aspect of "feminist" research'. The section of the press that served a female readership grew exponentially in this period and as middle-class women gained access to professions these publications began to cover women's work in photography, as well as profiles on individual female photographers and interviews with them at their studios. These sources, where photographers are quoted, provided proximity to their voices, personalities and experiences.

Maintaining a criticality around these sources was of course essential as the information that they provided was mediated through reportage and the political, economic and ideological allegiances of the publication. Moreover, as interviews were opportunities for self-promotion the claims made by the interviewees could have been designed to impress, as well as mask or exaggerate certain aspects of their work. A similar consideration around self-mythologising is relevant to photographers' memoirs

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⁴⁵ June Purvis, 'Doing Feminist Women's History: Researching the Lives of Women in the Suffragette Movemenet in Edwardian England' (London: Taylor and Francis, 1994), pp. 166–89 (p. 167).

that I drew on. In the twentieth century several high-profile photographers working during the 'golden age' of studio portraiture published autobiographies. Alice Hughes, Madame Yevonde and Dorothy Wilding, for example, all wrote about their experiences as portraitists to the rich and famous and what went on 'behind the scenes' of iconic photographs. These works do, however, provide valuable information about the structures and operations of studios, the relational dynamics that existed within them and how their work was regarded in their own moment.

To construct this thesis, I have woven together diverse primary and secondary sources and navigated vast archival gaps, using theoretical arguments and visual analysis to bridge them. My arguments are first and foremost historically based, using archival findings, and some are supported by theory. I use sociological and anthropological methodologies such as the analysis of interviews (albeit historical) for analysing social norms and conventions reflected through portraits and their production. I also employ textual and semiotic analysis from literary criticism and my analysis of particular objects borrows from material culture studies.

Aside from the secondary materials collated by Terence Pepper and other curators at the National Portrait Gallery there is no distinct, collected, institutional archive of original materials pertaining to women photographers at the Gallery or elsewhere, nor for the individual photographers discussed in this thesis. The business records of women photographers discussed in this thesis have not been preserved, neither has their personal correspondence. This has required me to draw on material scattered across multiple archives to build a picture of women's practice of studio portraiture in this period. In order to find out how women trained in photography I consulted the Regent Street Polytechnic archives at the University of Westminster. To understand the role of professional photographers in the suffrage campaign I consulted materials in the Women's Library and Museum of London collections. The National Archives

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⁴⁶ Alice Hughes, *My Father and I* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1923). Madame Yevonde, *In Camera* (London: John Gifford Limited, 1940). Dorothy Wilding, *In Pursuit of Perfection* (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1958).

⁴⁷ The National Portrait Gallery has 'photographer boxes' of supplementary materials collated over the past thirty years or so by curators. They contain miscellaneous items such as xeroxes of periodical articles, exhibition copy where the photographer is mentioned, and facsimile prints of photographs rather than primary sources. The Gallery does hold some of Alice Hughes' original correspondence and some day books. (ALH, National Portrait Gallery Archive).

provided access to image copyright forms filed by women photographers and also census data. I studied post office trade and street directories and periodicals held in the National Portrait Gallery's archive. To survey nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century periodicals and newspapers I used the British Library collection.

Methodological challenges

One of the major challenges for this project has been navigating archival silences and absences as well as the fragmentary and dispersed documentation to locate 'evidence' to support my claims. So often in this process, to use feminist theorist Sara Ahmed's phrasing, 'the hardenings of history' have led me to 'brick walls'. As This is a familiar experience for feminist historians and the issue of positive historical 'evidence' is contested. Judith Allen's landmark work on the vexed relationship between feminism and positivism in the mid 1980s critiqued the masculinist empiricism within the discipline of history that leads to women's agency and experiences being negated or distorted when primary sources cannot be located as 'evidence'. Allen elucidates how female historical subjects are rendered invisible when 'historical study is not the study of the past, but the study of the present traces of the past'. A core objective of this thesis is to make *visible* women photographers in accounts of the medium's past, therefore I have sought to work in mobile and elastic ways with 'evidence', or as Allen might put it 'the present traces of the past'.

Feminist, queer and decolonial historians have always had to work creatively with these archival absences and gaps to recuperate the stories of marginalised historical subjects. African-American studies scholar Saidiya Hartman's landmark contributions to archival studies have explored the potential of narrative devices belonging to speculative fiction as a potential solution to the problematics of archival lacunae.⁵² Critiquing the positivist bias within the discipline of history, Hartman

⁴⁸ Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 91.

⁴⁹ Judith Allen, 'Evidence and Silence: Feminism and the Limits of History', in *Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory*, ed. by Carole Pateman and Elizabeth Grosz (London: Routledge, 1986), pp. 173–89 (p. 178).

⁵⁰ Allen, p. 176.

⁵¹ Allen, p. 176.

⁵² Saidiya Hartman's influential essay 'Venus in Two Acts' examines the presence of 'Venus' (a cipher for enslaved African women) in the archive of Atlantic slavery. Hartman puts forward her theory of 'critical

observes that 'History pledges to be faithful to the limits of fact, evidence, and archive' but in an attempt to write 'impossible stories' and 'amplify the impossibility of [their] telling' scholars must strain against the limits of the archive.⁵³ 'Critical fabulation' is the methodology devised by Hartman, who positions herself as a witness 'involved in the project of remembering what the world has chosen to forget'.⁵⁴ Similarly, Holly Pester's work on 'Archive Fanfiction' also pushes against archival limitations by exploring the capacities of gossip and fan writing as feminist epistemologies. Pester proposes fabulation as an experimental and critically radical methodology that 'expands feminist critiques of universalising master narratives and archive orthodoxies'.⁵⁵ What is possible, or acceptable, in the practices of writing history is, therefore, currently being radically rethought.

While I do not apply this kind of methodology in my own work, this discourse has influenced my approach and decision making. To overcome the archival limitations, I have needed to be resourceful and creative in how I construct my chapters. I have been attentive to patterns and connections between sources and heeded my intuition. This was particularly necessary when researching the partnership of Alice Stewart and Kate Pragnell and its queerness, which as queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz famously observed, 'has an especially vexed relationship to evidence'. For I represent the photographers discussed in this thesis with as much clarity and accuracy as possible, interpreting the evidence available from different angles, remaining critical and paying attention to detail and historical specificity. I consider the context and function of the source, reading symptomatically and making inferences and deductions to write a meaningful, original and vivid study of women's photographic production in Britain in the period 1888 – 1914.

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fabulation', an effort to write 'the impossible' and narrate the counter histories of slavery, which ultimately 'perform[s] the limits of writing history'. Saidiya Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', Small Axe, 12.2 (2008), 1–14.. The objective of Hartman's book, Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval (2019), is to reveal the lives of 'ordinary' black women through speculative narratives, often using photographs as prompts for these narratives.

⁵³ Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', pp. 9–11.

⁵⁴ Saidiya Hartman, Interview with Saidiya Hartman, 2020

https://www.thewhitereview.org/feature/interview-with-saidiya-hartman/>.

⁵⁵ Holly Pester, 'Archive Fanfiction: Experimental Archive Research Methodologies and Feminist Epistemological Tactics', *Feminist Review*, 115, 2017, 114–29 (p. 114).

⁵⁶ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009), p. 65.

Another substantial challenge has been locating methodological and critical frameworks to help navigate the friction between women photographers as individuals resisting socially prescribed gender roles by becoming financially independent as entrepreneurs in the public sphere, while earning a living producing portraits of women that buttressed traditional gender paradigms and bourgeois notions of respectability. Put simply, it is a paradox that the images that women photographers produced often reinforced the gendered societal conventions from which they themselves dissented, to a greater or lesser degree. I believe there is a critical tension to be examined here and so I have avoided applying totalising labels such as 'radical' or 'conformist' that set up unhelpful binaries that often equate to systems of valuing women's cultural production (typically the eye of the academy is skewed toward the subversive or the ground-breaking). As Griselda Pollock writes in Vision and Difference, to map a feminist history, 'we have to describe the historically specific positions from which women intervened in cultural practices as a whole, sometimes working in support of dominant social ideals, at other times critically resistant, often allied with other progressive forces'.57 This thesis answers Pollock's appeal by addressing women photographers' interventions in the dominant culture while acknowledging and allowing space for the ambivalence between their upholding of social norms and their resistance to them.

Critical field

The first comprehensive history of photography, produced by Alison and Helmut Gernsheim in 1955, was concerned with photography as a tool for mass communication, science or art – it presents an evolution of the medium through different technologies as pioneered by individuals. As Patrizia Di Bello has observed, the Gernsheims 'construct an account of nineteenth-century photography in which the artistic value of the images diminishes as their commercial function increases'. ⁵⁸ The authors discussion of portraiture is polarised between 'famous' photographers such as

⁵⁷ Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, p. 24.

⁵⁸ Patrizia Di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers and Flirts* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 16–17.

Julia Margaret Cameron and Nadar and then 'the cheap trader' and 'low class street photographers'.⁵⁹ This study produced a chronology, and a classificatory and evaluative system that would then dominate the discipline of photography history.

In the late 1980s John Tagg reoriented the discussion of nineteenth-century photographic portraiture by considering the social and political meaning of the studio portrait, approaching it first and foremost as a commodity and assessing its democratic function. Tagg defined it as a means for individuals to acquire certain class status through representation and observed that: '[i]t was not on the exalted heights of autonomous Art that photographic portraiture made its lasting place, but in a profane industry which furnished the cosier spaces of the bourgeois home'. 60 The evolution of portraiture that Tagg plots through the different photographic technologies of the nineteenth century ends with the invention of the Kodak camera in 1888 that he determines caused a decline in the demand for studio portraits. While the rise of the amateur photographer and 'snapshotting' certainly changed the landscape of domestic photography, Tagg assumes that studio portraiture was solely a domestic form. My study shows the important role that studio portraiture played within the popular and political cultures of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The narrative that Tagg presents also ignores the fact that the Kodak empowered women to take up photography as amateurs and fails to consider how this shift in public attitudes towards women with cameras opened the door to women engaging in photography as professionals.

Steve Edwards notes that the 'allotropic' nature of the photographic medium (meaning that it can exist in multiple forms) has caused it to slip between the nets of social history and art history, resulting in a dearth of scholarship on this subject. ⁶¹ Furthermore, as discussed above with regards to the disciplinary positioning of the history of photography, there is a bias toward 'art photography' and great masters of the medium, which has led to limited scholarship on 'ordinary pictures'. Studio

⁵⁹ Helmut Gernsheim and Alison Gernsheim, *The History of Photography: From the Camera Obscura to the Beginning of the Modern Era* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), pp. 7–8.

⁶⁰ John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 58.

⁶¹ Steve Edwards, *The Making of English Photography: Allegories* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), p. 68.

portraiture falls into this category given its status as a commercial, domestic, often formulaic and *everyday* product that belonged to 'the home and the heart', to use Geoffrey Batchen's phrase. ⁶² Batchen's theorisation of 'vernacular photographies' is useful as a model for calling into question the value systems that dictate histories and canons of photography. For these popular, commercial, 'abject' photographs, Batchen observes that traditional art historical categories (for example, originality, authorship, intention) are not helpful. ⁶³ The 'idiosyncratic morphologies [of vernacular photographies] refuse to comply with the coherent progression of styles' and thus they become photography's 'parergon', repressed in dominant histories. ⁶⁴

The dismissal of popular forms of photography combined with a masculinist historical bias that devalues women's labour and artistic production explain why women's practice of studio portraiture has been marginalised. Scholarly attention is skewed toward the avant garde, which is a traditionally male arena of cultural production. To undertake the professional risk of challenging artistic orthodoxy and in order to be taken seriously, one must have a certain level of freedom, grounded in an established stability and legitimacy, as historian Maria Quirk astutely points out. Women artists who had worked had to establish themselves as professionals did not have this luxury. In her study of late Victorian women artists Quirk notes that women had to paint 'for the market' and describes the consequences of this in terms of the limitations of their subject matter. She writes that,

This economic strategy reinforced the widespread view that women were 'naturally' suited to these commercial, domestic and 'middlebrow' modes rather than to more academic or avant-garde styles, and this circular logic ensures that women then did not receive the patronage and support necessary to experiment in those styles.⁶⁵

⁶² Batchen, p. 262.

⁶³ Batchen, p. 268.

⁶⁴ Batchen, p. 262.

⁶⁵ Maria Quirk, *Women, Art and Money in Late Victorian England: The Hustle and the Scramble* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 8.

Quirk's point aligns with Linda Nochlin's renowned critique of the conditions out of which 'great art' can emerge in 'Why have there been no great women artists?'. Nochlin theorised the catch 22 situation that has historically hindered women's progress in the arts, showing how women artists were systematically denied the privileges of time, institutional support and technical training and then criticised and rejected by the art academy for producing work that did not match that of their male counterparts. As the field stands, in the literature that examines photography's commercial, industrial and 'vernacular' history there is no thorough investigation of women's practice, especially during the late Victorian and Edwardian period, and the feminist literature that focuses on women photographers does not adequately cover their commercial activity and processes of production. My work seeks to fill these gaps in scholarship.

Women's advancements in the photographic industry are consistently absent from large historical surveys of women's labour in Britain. ⁶⁸ Within the history of photography, the project of feminist revision has been underway since the mid 1980s. At the vanguard was Val Williams's landmark text *The Other Observers: Women Photographers in Britain 1900 to the Present*, which is an important precedent for my own work. Published in 1986 by feminist publishing house Virago, Williams's book was politically engaged, contributing to the construction of a 'women's tradition' by tracing early female practitioners through to feminist photographers working in Williams's own moment, such as Jo Spence. ⁶⁹

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⁶⁶ Linda Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', in *Women, Art, and Power* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), pp. 145–78.

⁶⁷ Studies have tended to focus on early photography. For example, *The Making of English Photography* (2006) by Steve Edwards, examines the industrial, commercial and artistic development of photography up to the 1860s through an analysis of nineteenth century photographic journals. Women photographers are only very briefly discussed. Steve Edwards, *The Making of English Photography: Allegories*, p. 100. Michael Pritchard's brief but illuminating survey of photographers operating between 1841 – 1891 using census records does consider women's share of the industry during this period and a discussion of the daguerreotypist Mrs Cooke. Michael Pritchard, 'Commercial Photographers in Nineteenth-Century Great Britain', *History of Photography*, 11.3 (1987).

⁶⁸ Women photographers do not feature in Gerry Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain since 1840* (Oxon: Routledge, 2005).; Elizabeth Roberts, *Women's Work, 1840-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).; Deborah Simonton, *A History of European Women's Work: 1700 to the Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

⁶⁹The project of constructing an alternative 'women's history' or *her*story was a strategy of the Women's Liberation Movement, established with texts such as Sheila Robotham's *Hidden from History* in 1973. Looking backwards as a way of interrogating women's position in the present was not limited to the books but also feminist journals. The most salient example of this for the present work is the coverage

Williams's text told a story, based in Britain, that began in 1900 and extended to her own moment at the time of writing. It is a cultural history, with each chapter looking at a particular time period or type of photography, spanning documentary photography, snapshot photography, studio photography, experimental photography and feminist photography. Because this history had not been told before Williams had a lot of ground to cover, therefore there were constraints to the level of detail the study could go into and the author had to be selective about the photographers she included, as noted in her introduction. To In her chapter on studio portraiture, Williams noted that it has largely been ignored within scholarship and 'has not been seen for what it was, as a social and economic liberator for many women'. Her assessment was that 'contemporary commentators [...] largely ignored or dismissed studio portraiture in England because [it was] perceived to have failed the criteria of incisive portrait photography established in the work emanating from Europe and the United States'. Williams's text provided an excellent launchpad for further research but this topic continued to be overlooked, until now.

In a chapter examining studio portraiture in Britain between 1900 – 1955, Williams charts a matrilineage of women studio portraitists from Alice Hughes, often credited as the first 'lady' photographer to set up her own business in 1891, through Lallie Charles and her apprentice Yevonde, via Dorothy Wilding, Betty Swaebe and Vivienne, finishing with the work of Jo Spence. Covering such a vast scope in twenty-five pages means that there are substantial limitations in terms of the detail that Williams could go into, and the range of sources employed. The study was also produced pre-internet, and the creation of online, searchable repositories between then and now has expanded the possibilities for primary research. My research homes in on a much

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of women's work in photography, including commercial studio photography, in a special issue of *Feminist Arts News* from 1987 devoted to women's role in arts and crafts between 1900 – 1910. Excerpts from the periodical press of the period pertaining to women's achievements as professional photographers were collated and Lena Connell's portrait of feminist actor, writer and suffragette Cicely Hamilton was reproduced. 'Opening the Pages of the Past', *Feminist Arts News*, 2.5 (undated), 23–26. Publication date was either 1987 or very early 1988 due to inclusion of an advertisement for contributors' Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry's 'The Edwardian Era' exhibition held at the Barbican Art Gallery in London, 12 November 1987 – 7 February 1988.

⁷⁰ Val Williams, *The Other Observers: Women Photographers in Britain 1900 to the Present* (London: Virago Press, 1986), p. 10.

⁷¹ Val Williams, p. 158.

⁷² Val Williams, p. 158.

shorter period, with a focus on one generation of women photographers who started their careers in the 1890s and it re-examines Williams's claims. The areas that *The Other Observers* briefly covers, I scrutinise, such as women's access to information about the photographic profession and options for training, their labour practices, the way that they positioned themselves within the photographic market and the role that their portraits played within constructions of gendered and classed identities. Williams blazed a trail with *The Other Observers*, and I want to acknowledge the immense value of this inheritance. My own work shares in its feminist spirit and motivations and seeks to re-orient discussions of women in photography back to this kind of cultural history that examines how photography was a 'social and economic liberator for many women', in material terms.

Naomi Rosenblum's 1994 book A History of Women Photographers, now in its third edition, is another key text that recognises women's commercial photographic work. Marketed as a 'comprehensive survey', it contextualises women's photographic endeavours within broader social history. The scope of Rosenblum's survey necessitates that its accounts are condensed, however, and some sweeping assertions are made. For example, she states that there was little demand for portraits in Britain before 1910 but the vast growth in photographic enterprises being established in the period 1890 – 1910 indicates that this was not the case. 73 Rosenblum's chapter on portraiture in the period 1890 – 1915 is skewed towards women's practice in the United States of America as, she claims, '[p]rior to the 1920s, despite struggles to achieve suffrage and parity in occupations, women in England did not loom large in photography, either as serious hobbyists or professionals'. ⁷⁴ The photographic opportunities afforded women in this period may have differed between the USA and Britain, but some of the most successful studios were owned by women and this thesis shows that their role in British social and cultural history is more significant than Rosenblum acknowledges.

⁷³ Between 1891 and 1911 the number of photographic business owners in Britain jumped from 3718 to 6,319. Bennett, R., Smith, H., van Lieshout, C., Montebruno, P., Newton, G. (2020). British Business Census of Entrepreneurs, 1851-1911. [data collection]. UK Data Service. SN: 8600, https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=8600.

⁷⁴ Naomi Rosenblum, *A History of Women Photographers*, 3rd edn (New York and London: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2010), p. 89.

Since Williams and Rosenblum's landmark texts were published, the field has expanded to consider different facets of women as photographic producers, collectors and compilers. There have been a number of book-length studies on individual women photographers such as Clementina Hawarden and Julia Margaret Cameron. Lindsay Smith's *The Politics of Focus: Women and Children in Nineteenth Century Photography* (1998), was also an influential text that examined the gendered aesthetics and ontologies of nineteenth-century photography by 'exorcising' established histories and using a radically interdisciplinary model. Patrizia Di Bello's *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England* (2007) further expanded the field to consider women as consumers of photography and album makers in the mid-nineteenth century.

My study shares a critical focus with Di Bello's regarding the construction of Victorian femininities and feminine culture through photographs. I also take inspiration and guidance from the ethos of *Women's Albums*, which challenges the assumptions and pejorative associations imposed on women's engagement with photography and argues for their important role in the visual culture of the period. Di Bello questions and ultimately refutes the 'common attitudes' and systems of value that have diminished women's photographic image making and collecting as 'quaint' and 'old-fashioned'.⁷⁷ While my research is concerned with professional women photographers their work has undoubtedly been subjected to the same set of patriarchal standards that label women's artistic endeavours as sentimental rather than serious, superficial rather than meaningful, or middlebrow rather than highbrow.

In terms of more recent scholarship in the field, Claire Raymond's 2017 book

Women Photographers and Feminist Aesthetics, takes an 'anti-art history approach',

drawing into dialogue work by women photographers across temporal and
geographical boundaries, whose work 'advocates feminism', a formulation borrowed

⁷⁵ See for example Colin Ford, *Julia Margaret Cameron: A Critical Biography* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2003).; Carol Mavor, *Becoming: The Photographs of Clementina, Viscountess Hawarden* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

⁷⁶ Lindsay Smith, *The Politics of Focus: Women, Children and Nineteenth-Century Photography* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 10.

⁷⁷ Di Bello, p. 1.

from bell hooks.⁷⁸ Each chapter focuses on a different pair or trio of photographers grouped through perceived affinities in artistic and/or political agenda and can be understood to 'visually agitate to end patriarchal domination'.⁷⁹ The study applies a formalist approach and arguments are supported with aesthetic and critical theory.

While Raymond's study is academic, the scope of the study aligns with several arts publications and exhibition catalogues published since the early 2000s that begin with Clementina Hawarden and Julia Margaret Cameron and chart a feminine (or 'feminist') sensibility through to women photographers active today. ⁸⁰ This tendency towards theoretical, trans historical, pan geographical studies that engage solely with the formal components of images by women photographers have drawn the focus away from the conditions of photographic production and photography's social and cultural significance. Moreover, it obscures the discrete historical moments when women used photography to emancipate themselves in very material, practical ways, i.e. setting up photographic businesses, becoming economically independent, and therefore pushing against societally prescribed and enforced gender roles.

A more recent study to examine the position of women photographers in the nineteenth century is Nicole Hudgins's *The Gender of Photography* (2020), which examines how 'masculine' and 'feminine' values shaped the first fifty years of the medium's history. Hudgins conducts a discourse analysis, observing 'language moves' in nineteenth-century photographic literature from England, France, and North America to rebalance the masculine bias, employing a model of 'yin and yang' borrowed from ancient Chinese philosophy and medicine. The study is significant for its investigation of the gendered value systems applied to photography throughout history, which is a dialogue to which my own study contributes. A third of Hudgins's text analyses attitudes surrounding women photographers and within this Hudgins devotes a chapter to women's commercial photographic practice, presenting a broad picture across a vast geography by synthesising scholarship from the past twenty-five

⁷⁸ Claire Raymond, *Women Photographers and Feminist Aesthetics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 9, 7.

⁷⁹ Raymond, p. 3.

⁸⁰ These tend to be focused on American and European photographers. See Boris Friedewald, *Women Photographers: From Julia Margaret Cameron to Cindy Sherman* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel, 2014).; Martin W. Sandler, *Against the Odds: Women Pioneers in the First Hundred Years of Photography* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc, 2002).

years on women's studio ownership until 1890. My work, addressing in more detail women's practice of studio portraiture in Britain and contextualising it within a broader discourse and culture through original archival research, picks up at the historical moment where Hudgins's study ends.

This thesis bridges the gap between feminist and materialist histories of photography. It contributes toward a growing critical field that is concerned with the social, political, economic and cultural conditions of women's artistic production. In the past ten years feminist studies in this vein have emerged with a specific focus on the professional and commercial facets of women's artistic production, for instance Patricia Zakreski and Kyriaki Hadjiafxendi's edited volume *Crafting the Woman Professional in the Long Nineteenth Century: Artistry and Industry in Britain* (2013) and more recently Maria Quirk's *Women, Art and Money in Late Victorian England* (2019). It also contributes to the recent critical interest in women's entrepreneurship in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁸¹

Thesis structure and chapter overview

The thesis is organised thematically with a broad chronology and is broken down into three thematic areas: chapters one and two examine how women entered the profession and the strategies that they adopted to establish themselves within the male dominated industry of photography. Chapters three and four look at women who, through their photographic practice, imagined, embodied and pictured alternatives to the status quo on the scale of the personal and within collective, organised politics. The final two chapters focus on the construction of idealised femininity, and how women's bodies were commodified and spectacularized in studio portraits through the machine of celebrity in the early twentieth century.

Chapter one considers the professionalisation of the 'lady photographer' through an analysis of the popular press and women's press in the 1890s and early

⁸¹ See for example Jessica P. Clark, *The Business of Beauty: Gender and the Body in Modern London* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020). Carry van Lieshout and others, 'Female Entrepreneurship: Business, Marriage and Motherhood in England and Wales, 1851–1911', *Social History*, 44.4 (2019), 440–68 https://doi.org/10.1080/03071022.2019.1656929.

1900s. I assess the ways that photography was presented as a career for women across the political spectrum of publications aimed at a female readership and examine the various routes that women took to learn the profession. The second chapter looks at the strategies used by women to establish their studios and navigate the masculine domain of commerce without violating gendered norms. I look at how the Victorian ideology of domesticity was instrumentalised to enable women to naturalise their work as portraitists and market this as a unique selling point of their businesses. From this examination of how some women photographers performed femininity and carefully couched their work within its respectable parameters I move to consider how other women's (collaborative) labour practices revealed the emancipatory potential of a career as a photographer. This discussion dovetails into a chapter on the role played by commercial women photographers within collective, organised feminist politics of the suffrage movement. I consider how the suffrage press enabled women photographers to network and the solidarity economies that they contributed to, as well as an analysis of women's portraits of suffrage activists. The representation of women as propaganda for a cause is flipped from the progressive to the conservative in chapter five as I consider Lallie Charles's manufacture of an idealised, nostalgic feminine aesthetic that buttressed the landed elite's rapidly weakening claim to power in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Finally in chapter six I examine the question of commodified femininity and the agency of the women represented via the collaboration of Edwardian actress Gertie Millar and her photographer Rita Martin, the younger sister of Lallie Charles.

Chapter 1

Periodicals and the professionalisation of the lady photographer

Towards the end of the 1880s the British popular press began reporting on the growing phenomenon of the 'lady photographer'. Her appearance in the pages of periodicals reflected a shift in cultural attitudes about who could claim the title 'photographer' following the Kodak camera's democratisation of photographic technology in 1888. Women of the bourgeoisie – hence the classed identifier 'lady' – with means and leisure time began 'snapshotting' their experiences and loved ones, quickly becoming a major target market for purveyors of photographic apparatus. However, over the course of the 1890s, women's engagement with photography evolved beyond the amateur as its potential as a professional occupation came to be realised. It is no coincidence that during this period the 'woman question' – a series of debates over the social position of women that had been percolating since the 1860s – reached a critical point, and paid employment for middle-class women was a primary concern.¹

This chapter charts the emergence of – and reactions to – the professional 'lady photographer' through an analysis of the late-Victorian popular press, moving on to consider how photography as a profession for women was represented within the rapidly proliferating section of the press dedicated to a female readership. In this latter section, I take periodicals with differing views on the 'woman question', analysing and comparing their engagement with photography as a profession for women. The centrality of the late Victorian periodical press in representing the new phenomenon of the 'lady photographer' and serving as a point of information and access to the photographic profession for women has been overlooked in scholarship. For example, while Naomi Rosenblum makes brief reference to articles on women's suitability for

¹ Lucy Delap, 'The "Woman Question" and the Origins of Feminism', in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. by Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 319–48.

photographic work from the 1890s, the focus of her discussion is skewed toward those working in the United States. As mentioned in the thesis introduction, Rosenblum dismissed British women's progress as professional photographers before 1920, stating that they 'were not nearly as active in portraiture as their American counterparts'.² The source or grounds for this claim are not provided. In *The Other Observers* Val Williams identifies 1900 as a transitional point for women's success as commercial photographers, however she does not consider the social and political changes that occurred in the preceding decade and facilitated this progress. Williams provides only a brief context to her discussion of individual studio photographers, writing that '[w]omen came to studio portraiture by varying routes and this gave to the structure of studio practice a special flexibility, which, by the early 1920s, was seen to be particularly appropriate for women'.³

To fill in these gaps, this chapter examines in detail the routes into professional photography that were available to women and explores specifically why studio portraiture was viewed as a suitable career for women. It considers how public attitudes to 'lady photographers' were shaped by, and contested within, both the mainstream press and the women's press. I offer a new, in-depth account of the professionalisation of women's photographic practice in Britain from the 1890s, and I contextualise this phenomenon within the nineteenth century feminist movement and its antagonists. By using the rich resource of periodicals – which both reflected and shaped their contemporary moment – I expose the reality that aspiring women photographers faced. What stakes were involved for a woman looking to enter this profession? What advice and assistance did she receive? How did she acquire training and what barriers did she face along the way? This chapter seeks to answer these, and other important, related questions.

² Rosenblum, p. 75.

³ Val Williams, p. 142.

From Amateur to Professional Photographer

The gendered status quo within the photographic industry before the watershed year of 1888 is well illustrated by Henry Baden Pritchard's 1882 landmark study of Europe's principal photographic studios.⁴ Over a two-year period, Baden Pritchard, who was the secretary of the Photographic Society of Great Britain and proprietor of the Photographic News, researched and visited twenty four enterprises and presented his findings through comprehensive descriptions of pricing, processes and the division of labour, diagrams of technical apparatus and layouts of studio designs. Through its meticulous detailing of the inner workings of successful businesses, the survey was framed as a manual of sorts for photographers wanting to set up their own studio or make improvements to their existing one. The Photographic Studios of Europe was ambitious in its scope and was presented as a general 'record of practice'. 5 It is an invaluable resource for historians of photography for the detail it includes, but what it leaves out is equally significant: all the studios featured were run by men. Although there are instances of women running photography studios – taking over from fathers or husbands – since the medium's inception, on the scant occasions that women are mentioned in Baden Pritchard's survey it is only as anonymous workers in large-scale enterprises run by men or as a devoted wifely assistant. 6 In his introduction the author stresses the lengths he went to, and distances he travelled, to immortalise the 'chief ateliers' of Europe, but despite his intrepid search, he clearly had a narrow notion of who could claim the title 'photographer', and what their practice might look like. The

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⁴ H. Baden Pritchard, *The Photographic Studios of Europe* (London: Piper and Carter, 1882).

⁵ H. Baden Pritchard, p. 3. Pritchard notes in the introduction to the 1882 edition that it was 'incomplete' and in the next edition he would publish details of the studios of Russia and Southern Italy. The second edition of *The Photographic Studios of Europe* was published in 1883. Both volumes were based on the surveys Baden Pritchard had carried out for the *Photographic News* between 1880 – 1883. It is likely this documentation project would have continued, however Baden Pritchard died suddenly of pneumonia in 1884 at the age of 43. Michael Pritchard, 'Henry Baden Pritchard', *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography Edited by John Hannavy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 1175–76.

⁶ At the Autotype Works in London 'A large number of young women find employment in the Works, especially in the retouching, mounting, varnishing and mechanical-printing rooms; but in the taking of negatives, sun-printing, and development of prints, only assistants of the male sex are employed, H. Baden Pritchard, p. 30. In the studio of Dr. Huggins at Upper Tulse Hill, London, Pritchard remarks that 'Fortunately, our worthy host has a worthy assistant in the person of Mrs. Huggins', H. Baden Pritchard, p. 88.

⁷ H. Baden Pritchard, p. 4.

photographers that Baden Pritchard met with are romanticised as 'princes of the camera' and 'artist[s] of a high order' whose work bears 'the imprint of his genius'.⁸ Ultimately, *Photographic Studios* is a text about male photographers, seen through the eyes of a man, and intended for a male readership.

Within the decade that Baden Pritchard's book was published the photography landscape underwent an enormous shift: there was, as some historians have described it, a 'revolution' in the medium's history. On 4th September 1888, the American photographic manufacturer George Eastman patented the 'Kodak' camera, a device that came pre-loaded with 100 exposures of roll film that needed to be sent back to the factory for developing. The Kodak separated out picture 'taking' from picture 'making', a technological advance that radically democratised the medium. This innovation had significant implications along gendered lines as photography became particularly popular with women who avidly took up 'snapshotting' as a hobby or to document family life. Kodak capitalised on this phenomenon, marketing their products to a female audience through the figure of the 'Kodak Girl' from 1901.

The boundaries between amateur and professional photographic practice were becoming porous at this moment. As the novel accessibility of photographic technology encouraged more and more women to experiment with it as amateurs through the 1890s, it became more culturally acceptable for a woman to be seen operating a camera. This subsequently had an impact on the number of women who recognised the professional potential of photography and decided to set up their own studios. As early as 1890 the popular periodical *Myra's Journal*, aimed at a middle-class female readership, commented on the volume of women taking up photography as amateurs and predicted a rise in women practicing professionally:

⁸ H. Baden Pritchard, pp. 123, 71.

⁹ Tagg, p. 56.

¹⁰ Robert Hirsch, *Seizing the Light: A History of Photography* (USA: McGraw-Hill Companies Inc, 2000), pp. 173–74.

¹¹ C. Jane Gover, *The Positive Image: Women Photographers in Turn-of-the-Century America* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 15.; Nancy Martha West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2000), pp. 53–60.

¹² 'Lady Photographers', Star (Guernsey), 17 June 1890, p. 1, British Library Newspapers.

Now that we see every day ladies going forth armed with camera and tripod stand, we cannot but assume that before long women will turn their attention to photography as offering a remunerative profession peculiarly suitable to their sex.¹³

The article went on to discuss the various 'sets' available to women seeking to learn photography, sold by companies such as the London Stereoscopic Company, and invited women to write into the magazine for advice if they were considering taking up photography for pleasure or professionally.¹⁴

The career of Alice Hughes (1857 – 1939) provides a prime example of how women crossed over from amateur to professional photographic practice. In 1894 *The Sketch,* a leading illustrated weekly journal, ran an interview with Hughes where she explained:

'I only began my work [...]in a professional way about three years ago; but I had already had considerable success as an amateur photographer, both when reproducing my father's pictures and when taking portraits of my friends. I found that my attempts in this direction were so much appreciated that I determined to take up the work professionally, with the result you now know,' she concluded smiling.¹⁵

Hughes was the daughter of the society portrait painter Edward Hughes and, acting as his assistant, had initially trained in photography to document her father's work. As she explained to *The Sketch*, she was so successful as a photographer that she decided to professionalise her practice and in 1891 she opened her own portrait studio at 52 Gower Street, London, next door to her father's studio. Hughes devoted herself to photographing upper class ladies and their children in a 'picturesque' style reminiscent

¹³ "The Ladies" Gallery', *Myra's Journal*, 1 November 1890, p. 10, Nineteenth Century UK Periodicals.

¹⁴ "The Ladies" Gallery', p. 10.

¹⁵ 'Photography as a Fine Art: A Chat With Miss Alice Hughes', *The Sketch*, 23 May 1894, p. 188.

of the work of Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough and by the mid 1890s her work dominated the popular Society magazines such as *Country Life*. ¹⁶

From the late 1880s satirical drawings of the new phenomenon of the 'lady photographer' began to appear in the popular press, such as this illustration in *Pick-me-up* from 1889 [Fig. 2], which depicts a woman taking a portrait of two men at the seaside.



Figure 2: 'The Lady Photographer', Pick-Me-Up, 7 September 1889, p. 358.

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¹⁶ Juliet Hacking, *Hughes, Alice Mary (1857–1939), Photographer* (Oxford University Press, 2008) https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/65306.

Looking at the sketch, our eyes are drawn to the two men who constitute the most dynamic part of the composition. One leans his arm insouciantly on the shoulder of his friend with legs crossed and cane cocked in a rakish attitude. The other man seems to be more genteel in his manner; he stands straight with his cane firmly rooted, striking a distinguished pose. We then note that their attention is directed towards a well-dressed woman who appears animated, gesturing toward them and standing to the side of a camera on a tripod, which is operated by another woman, whom we perceive only through her bustle and voluminous skirts as her head is swamped under the camera hood. The bathing machine that the photographer is set against and dark fabrics she is clothed in obscure her somewhat and instead our attention is focused on the standing woman and two men. A third woman is ambiguously depicted in the foreground of the illustration. With her back to the viewer, she surveys the scene, binoculars in her hand. She could be a relative or friend of one of the men, yet she seems to be linked to the other women, not only because the composition is divided along gendered lines – men (and boy in the distance) on the right and women on the left – but because she holds an optical tool that connects her to the work of looking, which occupies the other two women.

The figures' exchange is dramatised in the humorous caption. The business-like 'lady photographer' advises her male clients to have a half-length portrait and gives them her prices. 'Jones', who we assume is the caddish man because of his pose and the caption's acknowledgement that he is '(rather proud of his figure)', responds flirtatiously 'Why, Miss, that won't do; all my friends tell me my legs are the best part about me'. The traditional gendered positions of the person looking (male) and the looked-at person (female) are switched in this sketch, which generates the humour. Vanity, a trait conventionally associated with femininity, is ascribed to a man and the language of commerce and professionalism, traditionally a male preserve, is attributed to the female photographer.

The destabilisation of gendered dynamics that women operating cameras provoked at this historical juncture was again satirised in the comic *Funny Folks* in 1892 when the magazine's 'social fads of the day' series featured 'the lady amateur photographer' [Fig. 3]. In this illustration a man is posed for a portrait in a large greenhouse conservatory against a studio backdrop with a carpet and furniture laid

out to resemble a bourgeois drawing room. A fashionably dressed woman is operating the camera, shown in the process of exposing the plate by removing the lens cap. A young girl is shown at the photographer's side holding a small box camera on a tripod and a group of three women standing to one side instruct the sitter with animated hand gestures. Here, as in the *Pick-me-up* sketch, the women are active agents whereas the man is a passive object of representation. Women dominate the scene, and their number in this context connotes stereotypically that women flock to the latest trend or novelty. The inclusion of the girl photographer could also imply a lineage of feminine imitation. With this illustration *Funny Folks* dismissed the rise in women taking up photography by marking it as a 'fad', suggesting it was a frivolous and fashionable pastime without longevity.



Figure 3: 'Social Fads of the Day. - No. 5: The Lady Amateur Photographer', Funny Folks, 6 February 1892, p. 41.

However, while the title of this satire mocks the 'lady amateur' it is ironic that the arrangement of the portrait sitting in fact looks rather professionalised. Moreover, the photographer uses a large plate camera on a tripod requiring manual exposure

rather than a handheld camera such as the Kodak, which was used for 'snapshotting', the craze specifically associated with amateur photography. There appears to be little difference, therefore, between the 'lady photographer' transacting her business at the seaside and the woman in charge of the portrait sitting in figure 2, an elision that reflects how women crossed from practicing photography as a pastime to making it a profitable venture beyond the realm of satire.

On the same day that *Funny Folks* poked fun at women taking up photography as a passing fad, Myra's Journal published advice for women aspiring to a photographic career in their employment section in response to a reader's request. This disjunction encapsulates the tension between the acceleration of middle-class women's professional and artistic aspirations and the broader societal (patriarchal) discomfort about this progress. The feature establishes that there is evidence for women's prosperity in the industry by stating at the outset that '[i]n any large town, a really good lady photographer ought to succeed' and goes on to praise women's 'instinctual' aptitude for portrait photography, a pervasive gendered assumption that I will return to throughout the thesis.¹⁷ The column then advises the reader to train as an apprentice and provides information on the different roles and pathways available after training, and what sort of income to expect. Practical information on setting up a studio and the associated costs are also elucidated. This juxtaposition illustrates that while the popular press was minimising women's claim to photography as a 'fad' and leveraging jokes on the shifting of gendered power dynamics that enabled women to become agents, rather than objects, of representation, women were demonstrating their serious ambitions in photography by sourcing professional guidance from the section of the press that served their concerns.

The employment of middle-class women grew rapidly in the latter half of the nineteenth century. There were numerous factors that influenced this socio-economic shift, but three significant ones. Firstly, the increasing social acceptability of middle-class women engaging in paid work was a response to persistent concerns over 'surplus' women in this period, a phenomenon that was brought to public attention by the sociologist Harriet Martineau, who published an essay on the topic in *The*

¹⁷ 'What to Do with Our Daughters', Myra's Journal, 6 February 1892, p. 41.

Edinburgh Review in 1859. 18 Martineau, having studied the 1851 census returns, found that there was a much higher number of women than men living in Britain and predicted that as a result these 'redundant' women would not be provided for financially through marriage, so they needed to support themselves through paid work. 19 Secondly, the efforts of the Victorian women's movement, established in the late 1850s, helped middle-class women to access to the professions through campaigns for better education and the establishment of the Society for the Employment of Women in 1859. The third reason for the increase in middle-class women's employment in this period were changes to the tertiary sector in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The establishment of department stores and expansion of business and personal services (of which studio portraiture was one) created new roles that quickly became feminised, for example the shop assistant.²⁰ Despite these shifts, marriage and domesticity continued to exist as the ideal paradigm for middleclass women. 21 As historian Arlene Young notes, conservative attitudes about the appropriate position of middle-class women in society continued to circulate widely and heated public debate on the 'woman question' played out in the mainstream press.22

Within this context, suitable types of paid employment for middle-class women became a prevalent topic of discussion in the dedicated women's press in the 1880s and 1890s, often, as in the case of the *Myra's Journal* feature, under the rubric 'What to do with our daughters'.²³ This phrasing reflects how unease over the upheaval of gendered norms and women's demands for equality in this period was displaced onto young women by the commercial press, hence the reference to the 'daughters' (implicitly coded through the 'what to do' as a problem to be resolved) of the female reader of the magazine, who is imagined to conform to a bourgeois feminine ideal.²⁴

¹⁸ Harriet Martineau, 'Female Industry', Edinburgh Review, 1859, 293–336.

¹⁹ The number of unmarried women continued to grow over the decades and in 1911 there were nearly 1,4000,000 more women than men. Lee Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies at Work: Middle-Class Working Women in England and Wales, 1850 - 1914* (Newton Abbott: David and Charles, 1973), p. 11.

²⁰ Simonton, pp. 233–36.

²¹ Simonton, p. 233.

²² Arlene Young, *From Spinster to Career Woman: Middle-Class Women and Work in Victorian England* (Montreal and Kingston, London, Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), p. 163.

²³ Margaret Beetham, A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800 – 1914 (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 139.

²⁴ Beetham, pp. 139–41.

Employment was addressed by all stripes of women's magazine but was presented differently depending on the publication's allegiance to a progressive or a more conservative conception of femininity. Women becoming economically self-sufficient and in doing so escaping the perceived 'trap' of marriage was a key motive of the late Victorian feminist movement embodied by the 'New Woman' or the 'advanced woman', a figure who entered the cultural imaginary in 1894 following the publication of Sarah Grand's influential article 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question'. ²⁵ In the same year, the feminist and physician Dr Arabella Kenealy asserted that the advanced woman 'bravely precipitated herself out of a pink miasma of sloth and stagnation into the wholesome daylight of self-dependence and effort'. ²⁶ New Women wanted employment (as well as citizenship) to be gender neutral. Without access to a 'vocation' these progressively minded women felt they were being denied the right to 'individual development'. ²⁷

The concept of a 'vocation' had a class connotation in the nineteenth century, namely that it indicated bourgeois employment, distinct from the wage labour that the working classes (including working-class women) performed out of necessity. Because women from the middle classes were expected to remain in the domestic sphere, access to paid occupation in the public sphere constituted a 'radical demand', as historian Margaret Beetham has observed. ²⁸ In terms of the photographic industry, working-class women had in fact been an integral part of its operations since studios opened in the 1840s, and were assigned the majority of the menial work as anonymous 'hands'. ²⁹ As more middle-class women sought out paid employment towards the end of the Victorian period the roles within photographic studios were organised according to class and education. The domestic women's magazine *Hearth and Home* reported in 1897 that,

²⁵ Sarah Grand, 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question', *The North American Review*, 158.448 (1894), 270–76.

²⁶ Arabella Kenealy, 'Advanced Woman Number', *Idler*, 1894, p. 209.

²⁷ Beetham, p. 135.; B. A. Crackanthorpe, "The Revolt of the Daughters", *Nineteenth Century*, 35 (1894), 23–31.

²⁸ Beetham, p. 131.

²⁹ David Lee, 'The Victorian Studio: Part 2', *British Journal of Photography*, 1986, 188–90, 195, 199 (p. 189).

[i]n almost every studio the work of spotting and mounting is in the hands of women whose salaries vary from 15s to £1 10s a week. [...] Then again, a much better class of women is employed in the reception rooms of photographers' studios, many firms whose sitters are largely ladies and children, paying good salaries to women who have good manners and a ladylike appearance.³⁰

This division of labour was evidently to do with the public image of the establishment.

Behind the scenes work, the magazine tells us, was carried out by working-class women, whereas the front-facing, more sales-oriented roles were assigned to 'ladylike' middle-class women who were literate in the polite customs of the studio clientele.

A group portrait of the studio staff at Walton Adams' studio in Reading [Fig. 4], taken at the end of the nineteenth century, is indicative of the typical gendered breakdown of the leading photography studios in this period. In the portrait Marcus Adams, Walton's son, is surrounded by ten female employees. The two women flanking him are his sisters.³¹ The remaining eight women have been carefully styled (note the balancing of two women wearing a black waist ribbon and neck ribbon on each side of the composition) for the portrait with corsages and similar pale dresses, likely loaned from the studio for the occasion, so it is difficult to discern their class. Some have more 'fashionable' hairstyles, which could suggest a higher social status, although this is clearly not a reliable indicator. There is, however, no doubt here who 'the photographer' is. In the group portrait Adams is positioned just off centre in perfect focus, exuding authority in his dark suit and impressive moustache, holding some studio literature and presiding over his flock of female employees.

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³⁰ Pandora, 'Our Employment Bureau', *Hearth and Home*, 4 March 1897, p. 665. In the retail industry also, middle class women were preferable in customer service roles as they were cheaper to employ and there was a perceived sense that women knew best what other women wanted, see Simonton, p. 246. ³¹ Identified through another portrait of the family in the NPG collection: The Adams family group (Walton Adams; Christopher Adams; Annie Adams; Ivy Adams; Elsie Adams; Marcus Adams; Victor Adams; Lilian Adams; Norah Adams), possibly by Walton Adams, platinum print, late 1890s, NPG



Figure 4: The staff at the Walton Adams Studio in Reading (group including Marcus Adams) by Walton Adams, gelatin developing-out paper print, 1890s, 300 mm x 214 mm overall, National Portrait Gallery, London.

Between 1861 and 1901 women were joining the photographic industry workforce at twice the rate that men were.³² However, the so-called 'lady photographer', referred to by *Myra's Journal* and the satirical drawings examined above, was a distinct entity

³² Lee, p. 188. As the Victorian feminist movement gathered momentum from the 1860s and began to focus on the topic of women' employment, photography was documented as an industry where women were frequently employed as workers but where their advancement was stymied. In 1867 The Englishwoman's Review, the organ of the Society for the Employment of Women, reported that 'It is therefore not a little surprising that there are few female names in the long list of London photographers, although numbers of women are employed in almost every London photographic studio'. Their coruscating assessment continued: 'In photography, as in almost every other trade or profession, men will thankfully employ women as their subordinates, while they are jealously careful and anxious to exclude them from the knowledge which might permit them to practise the art independently. Women are graciously permitted to labour at the drudgery, while men reserve to themselves the easy task of directing the work and of taking the profit'. Janet Horowitz Murray and Myra Stark, Introduction to The Englishwoman's Review of Social and Industrial Questions 1866 - 1867 (London and New York: Routledge, 1980). In light of this state of affairs, The Society for the Employment of women attempted to set up a photographic school for women near Victoria Station in 1864, but it encountered numerous problems and was abandoned in 1867. Anne Bridger and Ellen Jordan, Timely Assistance: The Work of the Society for Promoting the Training of Women 1859 - 2009 (Ashford: The Society for Promoting the Training of Women, 2009), pp. 46–47.

from this vast body of female photographic workers. To be granted the identifier 'lady', which carried connotations of respectability and status, she came from a middle to upper class background, and as we will see throughout this thesis, the term also indicated artistic sovereignty.³³ The lady photographer was not a worker within the studio machine but rather at the helm, as the many interviews with leading female studio owners published in the 1890s and 1900s demonstrate. These features often mythologise and romanticise their subject – confirm her genius, even – in a very similar register to that granted to male photographers.

Feminist Periodicals

The following two sections compare how a photographic career was represented in divergent sections of the dedicated women's press. Examining a spectrum of different political positions, from progressive to conservative, I look at the leading feminist periodical of the day, *The Woman's Signal*, and the progressive publication *Atalanta* aimed at girls, moving on to look at the popular domestic women's magazine *Hearth and Home: An Illustrated Weekly Journal for Gentlewomen*. These publications introduced their readers to photography as a profession for women through a variety of modes: interviews with successful women photographers that provided inspiration and advice, articles that gave practical information about the industry and how to join it as well as responses to individual reader's enquiries on the subject. It is impossible to say how many women decided to pursue a career in photography as a result of reading about it but given the magazines' large readerships and the rise of women's studios in this period it is likely that the number was substantial.

From the early 1890s the feminist press began to home in on the potential of a photographic career for women who were seeking to emancipate themselves through a profession. This began in 1891 with an article in the leading feminist periodical *The Woman's Herald*, which billed itself as 'the only paper conducted, written and published by women' and was edited by the women's rights activist Helena B. Temple. The subject was the grand dame of art photography, Julia Margaret Cameron, whose brief but prolific career began in 1864. Her style was heavily influenced by the old

³³ Beetham, pp. 93–94.

masters and Pre-Raphaelite painting, and in 1874 – 5 Cameron produced photographic illustrations for Alfred Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. ³⁴ It is perhaps unsurprising that Cameron was held up as a role model because she was tenacious in her artistic vision, as well as a great promoter and disseminator of her work. With her experiments in soft focus Cameron challenged the orthodoxy of the photographic establishment – a gesture interpreted by the photographic theorist Lindsay Smith as a 'refusal of [...] perceptual mastery' that was implicitly coded as male. ³⁵ *The Woman's Herald* article mythologised Cameron by focusing on how she had 'surpassed all men' in her field, overcoming criticism and rising above the 'jealous craftsmen' who were 'striving to lower her'. ³⁶ Cameron was held up as an inspirational leader for 'women who are now treading in her steps and taking up the camera as a profession'. ³⁷ She was the foremother of a new generation of women photographers, proving that it was possible to succeed in a male dominated profession.

Two years later the same publication ran another lengthy feature on Cameron's life and work titled 'the story of a remarkable woman'. Again, the feature praised her as a visionary artist and humble woman with praise for her 'brightness of disposition', 'courage', 'energy', 'beautiful enthusiasm', 'power of influence' and her 'triumph over every difficulty'. These laudatory articles about an eminent woman photographer of the recent past paved the way for more future-oriented discussion of photography as a career option for women.

Soon after the publication of Cameron's life story, the editors of *The Woman's Herald*, newly re-branded as *The Woman's Signal*, found a contemporary to interview for a feature on 'lady photographers': Alice Hughes. ⁴⁰ As with the features on Cameron, the *Woman's Signal* interview with Hughes was designed to galvanise its readers to reimagine their horizons with a story of a remarkable woman who had

³⁴ Helen Barlow, 'Cameron [Née Pattle], Julia Margaret (1815–1879), Photographer' (Oxford University Press, 2017) https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/4449.

³⁵ Lindsay Smith, p. 37.

³⁶ 'Mrs. Julia Margaret Cameron: Founder of Photography as a Fine Art', *The Woman's Herald*, 4 April 1891, 369–70, 19th Century UK Periodicals.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ 'Julia Cameron and Her Work', *The Woman's Herald*, 6 July 1893, p. 318, 19th Century UK Periodicals. ³⁹ Ihid

⁴⁰ 'Lady Photographers: An Interview with Miss Alice Hughes', *The Woman's Signal*, 25 January 1894, p. 53, 19th Century UK Periodicals.

found a fulfilling vocation and answered a creative calling through photography. Hughes was praised as a 'pioneer lady photographer, who by sheer merit has gained for herself a large clientele'. 41 Swiftly, the interviewer asked directly for Hughes's view on photography as an 'employment for ladies'.42 Hughes opined that 'it is work for which they are eminently suited [...] they understand how to arrange dresses and to make a more artistic picture than men. Besides, it is work for which capable women are well paid'.43 Hughes was then asked for her advice on how women should qualify themselves for professional photography, responding that 'they should serve an apprenticeship, and then go as improvers. They cannot compete with men unless they are as capable. There is no room for them at the bottom, but plenty at the top'. 44 This comment was made on the back of Hughes's frustration about women's tendency to drop their photographic ambitions after marriage; by comparison, she stated, a man would 'look upon it as his life's work'. 45 Certainly, this concern would have been shared by the feminist editors of the paper who advocated women's independence and encouraged aspiration beyond marriage. Presenting Hughes as an authority on the matter, The Woman's Signal persuaded women interested in photography to become technically and artistically accomplished enough to be able to rival their male counterparts and strive to reach the top rungs of the profession.

Hughes's words were echoed the following year in a practical feature on how women could become professional photographers by Adeline Anning, who asserted that 'although photography is crowded below stairs, there is plenty of room in the upper storey'. ⁴⁶ This article was much more practical in content, offering pragmatic advice and technical information to educate readers on the prospects of a career in photography. Anning declared to her women readers that when looking for employment, 'work with a *future* rather than a *past* should be sought for, and this essential surely is to be found in photography'. ⁴⁷ As a rapidly evolving and increasingly democratised technology photography clearly aligned with the trajectory of the

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⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Anning, p. 159.

⁴⁷ Anning, p. 149. Original emphasis.

feminist cause that sought to advance the condition of womanhood. Photography represented futurity, modernity and a new realm of possibility where women could find 'self-dependence'.

The interview with Alice Hughes is representative in terms of how the work of studio portraiture was presented to women as suited to 'feminine' temperament and skills in this period. This formulation is particularly apparent in a feature on studio photography published in 1898 in the progressive magazine *Atalanta*, edited by the feminist novelist L. T. Meade (Elizabeth Thomasina Meade Smith) and aimed at young women: an impressionable demographic. The author, Ruth Young, begins:

Very few of the professions open to women are so pre-eminently fitted to the feminine mind as is Photography, which is an art which appeals to the love of the beautiful inherent in every woman, and to the love of perpetuating what is graceful and beloved, which most women possess. Men, with their minds set on money-gaining, or pre-occupied with scientific research, have no time to devote to small things. Photography appeals to a degree to the affections, and to that sentimentality which is womanly.⁴⁸

Magazines like *Atalanta* served a social function to prepare adolescent girls for womanhood. In this article, readers were informed of the unique position of photography as 'pre-eminently suited to the feminine mind'. As this seemingly uniform 'feminine mind' that the article refers to was something its youthful readers were striving to cultivate, this would have been particularly persuasive. Readers were simultaneously informed of supposedly innate feminine traits such as 'the love of the beautiful' *and* how photography aligned with this ideal sensibility. The article conveyed the message therefore that women would have a special advantage working with this medium because photographic practice was mastered through the traits that constitute womanliness. A key aspect of the above quotation is the reference to 'sentimentality which is womanly'. Certainly, it was the case that the commercial portrait industry was fuelled by sentimentality and therefore as the assigned

⁴⁸ Ruth Young, 'Photography as a Profession for Women', *Atalanta*, 1 April 1898, pp. 407–9 (p. 407), 19th Century UK Periodicals.

custodians of sentiment women had an advantage in producing its aesthetics and affects. The work of photography was coded as womanly, therefore by virtue of doing it one could acquire and refine her womanliness.

Notions of essential feminine characteristics seem reactionary to us today as binary genders are being deconstructed within contemporary feminism, yet politically progressive Victorian publications often deployed this rhetoric as a means to advance women's social position. Curiously, it is here that the discourses of the progressive magazine and the women's domestic magazine intersect. There was, however, a difference in motivation for using such sentiments: progressive magazines focused on women's 'natural' *advantage* and how they might compete with men for the 'top', whereas the domestic magazine considered the much milder *appropriateness* of this work in light of the 'feminine' skills that it necessitated. For the latter, these skills were associated with the demands of the domestic realm – the natural habitat of women as far as they were concerned according to Victorian social norms – so a career in photography would not cause women to stray too far from home. The next section examines the domestic magazine's handling of photography as an occupation for women in more detail.

The Woman's Domestic Magazine

Hearth and Home: An Illustrated Journal for Gentlewomen was established in 1891 to provide advice on domestic matters to a target readership of middle-class women who were married or intending to marry. Although the journal declared its opposition to 'the advanced or emancipated school of womankind' the first issue acknowledged the growing number of women who chose to remain unmarried and be economically independent, condoning this lifestyle as long as their employment could 'be fulfilled with sweet grace and without any sacrifice of those qualities which are sweet, beautiful and true belonging to the "perfect woman nobly planned" '.⁴⁹ This nominal acceptance of 'advanced' women has been interpreted as an attempt to head off her destabilising impact on the 'true' state of womanhood, which for Hearth and Home

⁴⁹ Hearth and Home, 1891, 1 (p. 1).

was grounded in domesticity.⁵⁰ Readers' demands that the magazine cover employment for women was not something that the editors could escape from and so, as with many other similar titles, a regular employment feature was established.⁵¹

The first instance of photography as an employment for women appears in the magazine in the mid 1890s with a warning about the misconception that photography offered a lucrative career path. The article quotes from a recent feature that had appeared in the photographic press about the difficulties of a career within the photographic industry; it commends its 'wise words' and hopes that they will 'be laid to heart by those who, dazzled by the exceptional success of a fortunate few, are inclined to look on photography as an El Dorado'. Aside from Hearth and Home's cynical position on professional photography, what this tells us is that by 1895 photography was considered to be a highly appealing career option and that the success of the well-known 'lady photographers' was inspiring women to seek out the same path.

Hearth and Home's ambivalence to this phenomenon was still present two years later when the editors caved to mounting pressure from the readership of 'Pandora's Employment Bureau' for information on a photographic career.

Begrudgingly, the editor responded to 'constant inquiries on the subject', beginning with the following disclaimer:

at present photography does not offer a sufficiently good prospect for educated women to permit of its being regarded as one of the employments in which success can be attained by ability, steady work and training.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Beetham, p. 140.

⁵⁰ Beetham, p. 136.

⁵² Until this point photography had only featured in *Hearth and Home* within the acceptable remit of recreational activity for women and girls through the 'photographic guild' feature whereby each month readers were invited to submit their photographs on a particular theme. 'Competition XLIV: Our Photographic Guild', *Hearth and Home*, 9 March 1893, 516, 19th Century UK Periodicals.

⁵³ Hearth and Home, 12 September 1895, 616, 19th Century UK Periodicals.

⁵⁴ Pandora, 'Our Employment Bureau', *Hearth and Home*, 4 March 1897, p. 303.

The unceasing stream of enquiries and the general conception of assured success in professional photography that the editor references indicate that by the late 1890s women's aspirations in this field were soundly established.

Further on in the article Pandora does, however, address the question of women's 'suitability' for photographic portraiture, stating her belief that it requires 'peculiarly feminine qualities', such as 'rapidity of observation, quick intuition of characteristic expressions, and a power of artistically disposing details, which tell in a photograph, appear to me to render them far more fitted for the work than men'.⁵⁵ This endorsement is, however, quickly tempered by a concern about the propriety of 'ladies' pursuing a career in photography. Class contamination is revealed as the root of this anxiety as Pandora explains: 'I hear from one lady who made the experiment that her experiences were anything but agreeable, her companions being of the same class which furnishes the ordinary shopmen'.⁵⁶ She goes on to state that campaigners seeking to open up workplaces to women (i.e. feminists) should 'prevail upon a first-rate firm to take lady pupils, and afterwards employ them to take portraits'.⁵⁷ By first rate, presumably Pandora refers to a higher-class establishment where middle-class women would not be required to work alongside working-class men, or women, for that matter.

The next time photography was mentioned in *Hearth and Home's* 'Employment Bureau' the issue of working alongside men of a lower class had morphed into an ostensibly far more progressive concern about male-run studios' failure to provide proper training to women apprentices. In February 1899 two apprenticeships with Kate Pragnell, then *Hearth and Home's* unofficial resident photographer of debutantes and Society wives-to-be, were recommended by Pandora with great zeal. Pandora recommended that this opportunity be 'seriously considered' by aspiring women photographers as Pragnell was 'perhaps the most skilled lady photographer in London one whose work is recognised as of quite exceptional artistic merit'. The editor went on to explicitly state the gendered disparity in employers' attitudes towards training

55 Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ihid

⁵⁸ Pandora, 'Our Employment Bureau', *Hearth and Home*, 9 February 1899, p. 539, 19th Century UK Periodicals.

women: '[v]ery few male photographers will do more than teach women-apprentices the mere mechanical parts of the trade, so this opportunity is all the more valuable'.⁵⁹ While this kind of sexism was almost certainly the norm, the magazine's motivation for painting an apprenticeship with a male photographer as undesirable cannot be taken at face value. Superficially, their approach could be read as a somewhat feminist directive to boycott male businesses, displaying a separatist kind of mentality that women are better served through solidarity with members of their own gender. However, given what we know of *Hearth and Home's* previous concerns about the integration of women into male-run firms and the threat to feminine respectability, it follows that their response to readers wishing to enter the profession was to dismiss this possibility and encourage them to train with a known quantity: a woman photographer who was on their books, so to speak.

The same concern about the problematical nature of training with a male firm was echoed in the employment section the following year in a response to an inquiry from a reader named Winifrede who sought information on 'lessons in photography'. ⁶⁰ The letter itself is not published but from Pandora's response, we learn that Winifrede was looking to set up her own studio and was seeking advice on training. Pandora stated, 'with a view to ultimately setting up for yourself you would do better to be apprenticed to some lady-photographer who would really teach you every branch of your business'. ⁶¹ She noted that the larger establishments that Winifrede had mentioned in her letter were cheaper, 'but in them the apprentice's interests are often very much neglected, and she leaves knowing only one or two processes instead of the whole art'. ⁶² Winifrede was advised to contact Alice Hughes and Kate Pragnell, among other successful women photographers, to find a placement as an apprentice and was offered assistance with their addresses. Again, readers were advised to work with a 'lady' even though these positions were few and far between given the comparatively

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⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Pandora, 'Our Employment Bureau', *Hearth and Home*, 19 July 1900, p. 458.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid. Regarding the typical costs of apprenticeships and wages for photographic work, Myra's Journal advised the following in 1892: 'The [apprenticeship] premium is usually about fifty pounds, and for the first two years, at any rate, there is no remuneration. If the apprentice becomes an assistant, she then received about a pound a week. Mounters are paid at about the same rate. A re-toucher gets more; this is a work which requires considerable technical skill, and those who do it well earn from a hundred to a hundred and fifty a year. 'What to Do with Our Daughters', p. 41.

small number of women-run studios and apprenticeship vacancies to their male counterparts. This offer of practical assistance does, however, demonstrate a loosening of the initial resistance that the *Hearth and Home* editors previously expressed as the turn of the twentieth century ushered in a more tolerant view of middle-class women's employment.

Hearth and Home's employment bureau is a salient example of how, perhaps even despite itself, the commercial women's press served as an educative space for women seeking to make photography their profession. The reticence towards this phenomenon that Hearth and Home exhibited in the mid 1890s had softened by the end of the decade when the bureau was informing readers of what they deemed the best possible option: training with a 'lady' who had their seal of approval. While it is the case that their discomfort with women entering male spaces of commerce was thinly veiled, they did actively help to connect their readers aspiring to a photographic career with established female-owned studios who could provide genuinely comprehensive training and career prospects.

The established norm of women being introduced to photography through the periodical press in this period is demonstrated by a romantic 'novelette' published in *The London Reader* in 1901, titled 'Her Photographer'. In this story the heroine, Frances Tremeyer, is an enthusiastic amateur photographer who, in the opening dialogue, explains to her companion Kitty how she came to practice photography: 'Read an article on it and thought it would be something to do. So I went to the Kodak Company and bought a camera, took some lessons; and it seemed then quite easy, so I began'.⁶³

As the decade of 1900 advanced, women's access to photographic careers was enabled by new types of political publications, namely suffrage magazines such as *Votes for Women* and *The Vote*, which will be elaborated on in chapter four. Interviews in the popular women's press with successful photographers such as Lallie Charles,

⁶³ 'Her Photographer', *The London Reader*, 5 October 1901, 601–11.

Kitty expresses concern for Frances's loss of femininity through this new pastime, namely her wan complexion. Frances replies 'who cares how I look? I am sure I don't for one. I have been in the dark room a good deal lately.' 'I feel much happier since I discovered this new occupation. It gives me something to think about. And when I am shut up in my little room I don't think about – about other things.'

Alice Hughes and Kate Pragnell were also being published with more regularity, ever increasing the visibility of women thriving as professional portraitists. These practitioners were held up as role models for ambitious middle-class women and quizzed on the suitability of photography as a 'feminine' occupation. In these 'chats' with photographers they were asked to describe their own career path, and what advice they would give to a woman seeking to enter the profession. When Kate Pragnell was interviewed by *The Woman at Home* in 1901, she gave the following suggestion:

Frankly I should advise her to cultivate, as far as may be, any business faculty with which she may be possessed, and to join the classes at the Polytechnic, to learn the mechanical part of photography. What I and every other employer are always looking out for are young women who will carry out orders implicitly, and who can be trusted to see through a piece of work in a reliable and business-like manner. All our printing – and you know what a very important item that is – is done by ladies. But there is in photography, as in everything else, no room for the woman who remains, or who, more strange still, wishes to remain, an amateur.⁶⁴

Coded within this statement is the message that in order to become a successful professional photographer, a woman must adopt masculine attributes such as business acumen and the ability to work independently and shed any association with feminised amateurism. For those looking to set up their own studios, Pragnell was frank about the level of competition in the industry, the substantial investment, and hard work ethic required to succeed. We observed above that *Hearth and Home* magazine advised its readers to contact Pragnell regarding an apprenticeship, and while the photographer did exclusively train and employ women, her recommendation to enrol in formal photographic education would likely have expanded readers' awareness of this alternative route into the profession. As we will see in the next section, polytechnic education gave the women who could afford it the comprehensive training that they were unlikely to receive as apprentices due to what historian of women's

⁶⁴ Ignota, p. 673.

work Deborah Simonton refers to as the 'preservation of the male career structure', where they were kept in lower paid roles with no path to progression. 65

Polytechnics and professional photographic training for women

In 1898 The Woman's Signal published an article on photography for women that included an interview with the American expatriate photographer and co-editor of the journal Photogram, Catherine Weed Ward. The interview explores the barriers that women faced to entering the photographic profession, which, for the ever-forthright Ward, boiled down to 'prejudice, and the custom of not regarding women as ordinary human beings'. 66 The article then breaks down the monolith of sexism into the ways that it practically impeded women's aspirations to become photographers, which is worth quoting at length for the insight it provides:

the ways of commerce are not open to her as they are to men; capitalists will not employ her or assist her in business on equal terms with men; they will not give her the opportunity which men enjoy of training for the best paid posts. This agrees with the experience of most people who have gone into the matter. It is probably within the mark to say that there is hardly a photographer in London – if indeed there be found one – who would employ a woman to take a photograph. She may receive clients and book orders, she may 'retouch' - and skilful 'retouchers' are well paid – but she will not be allowed to take a likeness. Nor is she suffered to learn the art and business. A young woman cannot be sent to a photographer's to go right through the various processes to the very top. The only thing for her to do is to go, as Miss Alice Hughes did, to the Polytechnic, and pay down £50 for a complete course of training.⁶⁷

Here, the author, Emily Hill, synthesises Ward's perspective with her own to outline the difficulties that women faced in terms of opening their own studios and accessing

⁶⁵ Simonton, p. 246.

⁶⁶ Emily Hill, 'Photography for Women: An Interview with Mrs. Weed Ward', *The Woman's Signal*, 28 April 1898, pp. 259-60 (p. 260).

⁶⁷ Hill, p. 260.

proper training. Men were the gatekeepers of funds and opportunities, and they were reluctant to hand the keys to women. Although women worked within the industry in ancillary roles, they were not permitted to 'go through [...] to the very top' and take photographs themselves. Creative control belonged to men and they guarded knowledge about 'the art and business' side of running a photographic studio. Hill was adamant that women would be denied a smooth progression from apprentice to operator within an average photographic firm. In light of this status quo, side-stepping the problem of male gatekeepers who could decide an aspiring woman photographer's fate by attending courses at the Regent Street Polytechnic was, to Hill's mind, 'the only thing for her to do'.

The Regent Street Polytechnic in Central London (sometimes referred to as the London Polytechnic) accepted women students onto its photography course from 1883 if they were already employed in the trade. This initial entry criterion has interesting ramifications in terms of class, as it was more likely to be women of the working and lower-middle classes already in photographic employment, which means theoretically that those (typically wealthier, more privileged women) without that work experience would be disadvantaged. Although of course women of the lower class may have struggled to afford to the fees.

Departmental records from the Regent Street Polytechnic only survive from the mid 1900s, but they indicate that by this stage a high volume of the students were women. For example, in the first-year cohort in the academic year 1906 – 1907 seventy one percent of the students were women. For high number of women students enrolled on the Polytechnic course suggests that it was a more appealing and accessible alternative to training within the industry where their progression would be restricted. Indeed, the success of 'girl' students frequently warranted mentions in the end of year departmental reports and details of their various successes upon graduation are remarked on. Women are reported to have obtained industry positions directly from their training and a number also opened their own studios straight from

⁶⁸ Helen Glew and others, *Educating the Mind, Body and Spirit: The Legacy of Quintin Hogg and the Polytechnic, 1864 - 1992.* (Chesterton: Granta Editions, 2013), p. 124.

⁶⁹ Calculated using the following source: Polytechnic Education Department: Departmental Reports, 1906 – 1911, Photographic Department Report 1906-1907, RSP/2/5/2, University of Westminster Archive.

the school.⁷⁰ Departmental reports also reveal that Alice Hughes, whom Emily Hill referenced in her article for *The Woman's Signal*, was evidently so impressed by her own experience at the Polytechnic in 1887 that, twenty years later, she paid for her own employees to train there.⁷¹ As Hughes told *The Woman's Signal* in 1894, she was committed to a female studio staff and 'always g[a]ve the preference to a woman if [she] wanted assistance'.⁷² It was unusual for a proprietor to 'outsource' training by paying to send groups of employees for formal photographic training outside of their establishment. The fact that this warranted special mention in the Polytechnic's end of year report attests to both Hughes's fame at this point and how remarkable an occurrence this was.

Unlike the patchy processes that were reportedly taught to apprentices within the average photographic studio, the Regent Street Polytechnic, which billed itself as 'the first, largest and most successful school of photography in the world', offered a comprehensive syllabus that covered all stages of the photographic process from operating and negative preparation to retouching and printing. Figure 5 is a newspaper reproduction of an illustration depicting a photography class at the Battersea Polytechnic in 1895. Out of nine students, three are women and all appear as engaged in their training as their male peers. A woman student is central to the composition, holding a photographic plate, absorbed by the male tutor's demonstration of how to prepare a chemical solution. Another woman student nearby bends down to a store cupboard in the foreground, and in the background a woman holds a negative up to the light to examine it. By the late 1900s the prospectus for photography classes at the Regent Street Polytechnic expressly appealed to women students:

⁷⁰ 1908 – 1909 reports note that three women (Miss Le Meme, Misses Macfarlane and Miss Florence Van Damm) 'opened businesses direct from school'. Van Damm went on to have a very successful career in London and then in New York as a theatrical photographer in the 1920s. Polytechnic Education Department: Departmental Reports, 1906 – 1911, Photographic Department Report 1908-1909, RSP/2/5/2, University of Westminster Archive.

⁷¹ The end of year report notes 'Trained five young women for Miss Alice Hughes'. Polytechnic Education Department: Departmental Reports, 1906 – 1911, Photographic Department Report 1908-1909, RSP/2/5/2, University of Westminster Archive.

^{72 &#}x27;Lady Photographers: An Interview with Miss Alice Hughes', p. 53.

⁷³ Regent Street Polytechnic Syllabus and Prospectus 1888-1889, RSP/5/4/1, University of Westminster Archives.

In the case of training for ladies and girls also, Photography is daily receiving more attention owing to the large number who are finding occupations in one or other of the various sections of the industry. At the present time there is an opening in every provincial town in the country, for a lady with artistic tastes and initiative.⁷⁴



Figure 5: Illustration of a photography class at the Battersea Polytechnic, Newspaper clipping, 1895, Battersea Polytechnic Archives, University of Surrey.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered how, in the 1890s, women's amateur engagement with photography crossed over into a professional realm, through the lens of the periodical press. We have seen how magazines aimed at women served as an educative space for their female readers to inform themselves and find inspiration for establishing their own enterprises, whether that was through features on a female 'pioneer', interviews with contemporary practitioners or responses to readers' letters on the subject.

⁷⁴ Regent Street Polytechnic Photography Prospectus 1909 – 1910, RSP/5/4/17, University of Westminster Archive.

Hearth and Home and The Woman's Signal had divergent agendas and ideological positions on women's social roles, yet there are points of connection in their presentation of women's access to the photographic profession. Firstly, both publications noted the dearth of adequate training and the obstacles that aspiring women photographers faced. One of the major obstacles mentioned by both case studies occurred in the process of moving up to a position of control over production – to actual operating work – and avoiding getting snagged on one of the more menial rungs during that climb. The employment bureau feature in *Hearth and Home* went some way to help women by providing practical information and assistance, parting with their earlier cynicism as the twentieth century came into view. Predictably going much further to empower their readers, The Woman's Signal encouraged women to take matters into their own hands and pay for formal education that would grant them equality of opportunity. If a woman could find a way to extract herself from the 'lower storey' she would, as Alice Hughes attested, find that there was 'plenty [of room] at the top'.75 The photographers that I introduce in this thesis managed to reach the top and run some of the most successful studios of the day as the industry grew.

The second intersection is the periodicals' shared notion that women were suited to the work of portraiture because of certain 'natural' feminine attributes such as empathy and an intuitive understanding of dress. An important point to note, however, is that the distinction in the magazines' respective presentations of this notion lies in the agency that the imagined female reader is ascribed. *The Woman's Signal* instrumentalised the notion of 'feminine' skills to encourage women to aim for equality with men professionally or even to outshine them by taking advantage of their 'advantage', so to speak. Their concern was what women could *do* with their femininity, how they could capitalise on the scant currency that a patriarchal society had granted them. On the contrary, conservatives were preoccupied with preserving the parameters of what a woman could, or should, *be*. Fundamentally, they believed that if women had to work at all, they should at least engage in a type of labour that appeased or conformed to the patriarchal standard to limit the transgression of traditional gendered paradigms. The kind of feminised labour that photography was

⁷⁵ 'Lady Photographers: An Interview with Miss Alice Hughes', p. 53.

considered to necessitate will be explored further in the next chapter, which looks at the strategies that women photographers employed to carve out space for themselves within a male-dominated industry.

Chapter 2

'This Fair Abode of Femininity': women's practice of studio portraiture and the ideology of domesticity

The ideology of domesticity cited in the title of this chapter refers to the complex nexus of prescriptive norms, values and gendered assumptions that specified the home as women's sphere in the nineteenth century. This ideology defined how femininity was constructed socially, politically, economically and culturally within Victorian patriarchy. Much ink has been spilled contesting the rigidity of the gendered 'separate spheres' societal model of Victorian Britain, but it was certainly the case that the economic ideal was for men to work and support the women in their family, whether they were daughters, wives or other relations.² Regardless of whether some women had to pick up forms of paid employment to make ends meet (as was typically the case in working-class families), aspirational Victorian values required women to manage the home; their role within the economy was reproduction and consumption, while men handled the production of goods and services. Even as this dominant paradigm was being slowly dismantled in the latter half of the nineteenth century as women gained access to education and more socio-political autonomy, to be a middleclass woman running a photographic business constituted a deviation from the norm. In this chapter I consider how women photographers navigated the public/private frontier by instrumentalising aspects of the feminine ideal (as defined through Victorian domestic ideology) to soften their transgression of women's 'rightful' place and role to become producers within the masculine domain of commerce.

¹ The theory of 'separate spheres' as in public/private (masculine/feminine) was elucidated in the influential text by Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780 - 1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987). The man of the household was expected to be the breadwinner and bring home a 'family wage'. Hilary Land, 'The Family Wage', *Feminist Review*, 6, 1980, 55–77 (p. 56).

² Anne Digby, 'Victorian Values and Women in Public and Private', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 78 (1990), 195–215 (p. 206).; see also Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988).; Janet Wolff and others, *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power and the Nineteenth-Century Middle Class* edited by Janet Wolff and John Seed (Manchester: Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).; Patricia Zakreski, *Representing Female Artistic Labour*, 1848-1890: Refining Work for the Middle-Class Woman (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

The historian Anne Digby's identification and theorisation of 'social borderlands' – a series of moving frontiers where Victorian women could inconspicuously traverse the public/private divide – provides a springboard for my argument in this chapter.³ Digby explains how women of the bourgeoisie engaged in the semi-public, civic activities of philanthropy, voluntary work and involvement in local government by stretching the ideology of domesticity beyond the home. She cites campaigner Mrs Fordham, who, in 1896, sought to rally other women to become parish councillors by stating: 'the government of the village is but the government of the home, but only on a larger scale'.⁴ Just as women's occupation of these civic spaces was permitted through a conceptual expansion of the domestic sphere, I suggest that this could be extended to commercial spaces such as the photographic studio. As a hybrid space that was unequivocally public yet assumed the semblance of the private sphere in the public imaginary through its staging, we might conceptualise the studio as another type of 'borderland'.

My argument interrogates this phenomenon further, examining not only how women photographers capitalised on the public/private hybridity of the studio but how they mobilised familiar feminine skills grounded in the ideology of domesticity to legitimise their enterprises and compete in the marketplace. To do this I draw on three key areas. I begin by analysing the speeches of the vocal advocate for women photographers, the American expatriate photographer and feminist Catherine Weed Ward who was introduced in the previous chapter. In her speeches encouraging women to set up photographic studios, Ward, a committed feminist, instrumentalised the rhetoric of domesticity and feminine duty. Resident in Britain from 1892, Ward had considerable public influence through her journal the *Photogram*, which she cofounded with her husband Henry Snowden Ward in 1894; how she chose to attract women to the profession and define it within the public imaginary is therefore significant. Having explored how the ideology of domesticity was foregrounded within

³ Digby observes that the borderland accommodated differences within Victorian women's experiences as it was not unusual for working-class women (and, indeed, some middle-class women) to take up part time work outside the home. Digby, p. 198.

⁴ Mrs. E.O. Fordham, 'Why Women are Needed as Parish Councillors', Parish Councils Journal, 1 March 1896, cited in Digby, p. 203.

strategies to facilitate women's access to photography, I zoom in to examine how women photographers 'implemented' such ideas within their businesses. I consider how they tactically constructed their studios as all-female – and expressly 'feminine' – spaces, much like the drawing room of the middle-class household where women congregated. I suggest that the gendered segregation and performances of idealised femininity that occurred within these studios appeared to heed traditional Victorian values and ensured propriety, neutralising any prospective protest about what Digby terms 'frontier violation'.5 After assessing the carefully constructed public images that these photographic enterprises presented that enabled them to be understood, accepted and assimilated without threatening patriarchal codes, in the final section I consider how women photographers mobilised the ideology of domesticity in their engagement with clients to create what we might now term a unique selling point. To contextualise this, I analyse the academic artistic discourse of the period surrounding 'portrait event', to borrow the art historian Angela Rosenthal's term for the intersubjective encounter between artist and sitter, and reconsider the emphasis placed on the concept of sympathy in the 1890s. Given the contemporary importance ascribed to the artist's capacity to be 'in sympathy' (i.e. attentive to their sitters' emotional state) I argue that women had a gendered advantage in this respect as they were able to draw on cultural notions of 'feminine feeling' and women's traditional role as the sympathetic, emotional regulators of the household. In summary, this chapter maps the way that the ideology of domesticity was instrumentalised by women photographers from the discursive tactics that enabled their access to the profession, through to the material spaces of their studios and practices that occurred within them.

It is important to note here that I am aware of the historically situated differences between the way that women in the nineteenth century understood their femininity and my own understanding of femininity as a woman living in the twenty first century. Ours is an era defined by identity politics and informed at least in part by

⁵ Digby, p. 198.

⁶ Angela Rosenthal, *Angelica Kauffman: Art and Sensibility* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 46.

a post-Butlerian notion of gender as a social construct and performance. By contrast, in the dominant discourse of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, femininity was heavily naturalised; one might argue that, immersed in such a setting, women photographers might not have had the critical agency to re-appropriate the ideological gendered constructs projected onto them. Perhaps they truly believed the comments they espoused about women's 'natural' capabilities. But an integral part of the work of studio portraiture was scrutinising the performance of (gendered) identity, and the photographers themselves had deviated from a number of feminine expectations by becoming businesswomen. We can fairly assume, therefore, that they keenly understood the ideological nature of gendered norms – and their capacity to make these work in their favour. The intentionality of the women photographers discussed in this thesis is not accessible to us (even their statements made in interviews are not entirely reliable evidence of their personal views); what matters is that, whether consciously or unconsciously, they were able to convert femininity from a weakness into a strength, specifically, into a commercial advantage over their male counterparts.

From the household to the studio: the recruitment of women photographers

According to the photographic historian Margaret Denny, Catherine Weed Ward 'made it her duty to help women gain greater access to photography and its institutions'.8 Ward became an influential role model for women aspiring to be photographers through her own successful photographic work, her speeches in America and Britain and published articles advocating women's entry into the profession. After her relocation to England in 1892 she wrote a column on 'women's work' in The Practical Photographer and disseminated her ideas further through her own journal The Photogram. Ward's activism entailed identifying the barriers that women faced when seeking to practice photography as both professionals and amateurs and campaigning to remove them.9

⁷ Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', Theatre Journal, 40.4 (1988), 519-31 https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893.

Margaret Denny, 'Catharine Weed Barnes Ward: Advocate for Victorian Women Photographers', History of Photography, 36.2 (2012), 156-71 (p. 157).

⁹ Denny, 'Catharine Weed Barnes Ward: Advocate for Victorian Women Photographers', p. 157.

The most significant obstacle, was of course, the patriarchal orthodoxy that kept women consigned to the domestic realm. Speaking of this social norm in the British feminist periodical *The Woman's Signal* in 1898, Ward stated: 'a woman should do everything and go everywhere she chooses, just like any male human being. To talk of woman's sphere seems [...] absurd [...] Woman's sphere generally means a hemi-sphere'. As this statement indicates, Ward was uncompromising in naming the social and political obstructions that women faced in their attempts to enter the male-controlled domain of professionalised work. Her words demonstrate a heightened political awareness of the subordination of women through the division of public and private spheres and how she wanted to see it dismantled.

In light of Ward's political position on this matter, we can examine her key strategy for empowering women to join the photographic profession, namely the persuasive analogy that she drew between the household (and the feminised skillset it necessitated) and the photographic studio. Ward appealed to aspiring women photographers by stating that they were *already* in possession of the skills necessary to run a photography studio and presented photographic work in direct contrast to the boredom inherent in middle- and upper-class women's domestic duties. She informed her American audience as early as 1891 that, '[p]ortrait galleries are being successfully managed by women, here and in Europe, and to do so requires something of the same qualifications as to manage a household, while it is not nearly so much of a treadmill'. She furthered her comparison between the studio and the home as follows:

[e]verything can be better systematized, and you are not liable to the irritating interruptions of a household. The greatest conceivable genius can never take the place of well-ordered management, and this is one reason why photography should appeal to women who earnestly desire to improve. There is a positive moral force in this work, and the habit of being obliged to follow the fixed laws

¹⁰ Hill, pp. 259–60.

¹¹ Catherine Weed Barnes Ward, 'Women as Professional Photographers', *Wilson's Photographic Magazine*, 28 (1891), 686–89. reproduced in Peter E. Palmquist, *Catherine Weed Barnes Ward: Pioneer Advocate for Women in Photography* (Arcata, California: Peter E. Palmquist, 1992). pp. 43 – 49.

¹² Catherine Weed (Barnes) Ward, 'Women as Professional Photographers', p. 48.

of nature in working out chemical formulae, for instance, cannot fail to check impetuous impulses and sober them into practical usefulness.¹³

Here we see how Ward co-opted the language of domestic duty: successful photographic practice involved not genius (a masculine preserve) but instead the more humble 'well-ordered management', a familiar skill required of women irrespective of class. Ward then drew on the moral imperative of the ideology of domesticity, stating that photography offered women (the moral, emotional and spiritual guardians of the Victorian household) a more valuable opportunity for 'improvement' and moral governance than domestic duties. The notion that following chemical formulae would help to 'check impetuous impulses' and 'sober them into practical usefulness' presents photography, in quite explicit terms, as a cure for any potentially deviant behaviour, implying its potential to improve one's conformity to the traditional feminine ideal.

Ward extended this notion of duty and called on upper- and middle-class women to help their lower-class sisters into the profession in a charitable spirit:

If more women, and especially young ones, gifted with ambition and mental force, develop whatever faculties God has given them, as to escape the reproach of the man with one talent, they would only be doing their plain duty; but, as in developing our mental and moral character, we are able to assist others, the plain duty becomes a binding obligation. Where one woman succeeds another can do so, and those who, protected by circumstances, have not the pressing need of wage-earning borne in upon them, have the high and grand duty laid squarely on their shoulders to act as pioneers, and cut paths for their less fortunate sisters. This will dignify many a pleasant occupation into a sacred duty, and where, as in this work of photography, the help can be of such positive practical value, life will be found to have gained in height, breadth and depth, to an extent once thought hardly possible.¹⁴

¹³ Ward, p. 48.

¹⁴ Ward, p. 45.

We can observe within this statement how Ward rapturously encouraged women to become 'pioneers' of photography by elucidating a hierarchy of 'duty'. She suggested that for women of the middle and upper classes, to develop their 'God-given faculties' and try their hand at the medium is their 'plain duty'; to rally other women into the profession was a 'high and grand duty', which in turn becomes a 'sacred duty' that carries the utmost reward. With the zeal of a preacher, Ward promised that by taking up the photographic profession women's lives would be immeasurably benefitted: practically, morally and spiritually.

A further component of Ward's advocacy presented the advantages of working in a photographic studio, which she referred to as a 'portrait gallery', over other types of work deemed appropriate for women, such as working for a milliner or dressmaker. She explained:

The labor in a studio is comparatively sheltered, there is little noise or confusion, and one is not forced to be constantly on one's feet. I have elsewhere urged women being employed in the galleries, to give not only advice, but assistance with the sitter's toilet. Half of the women who sit for portraits have very incorrect ideas as to proper dressing. Such a position ought to be remunerative, and much pleasanter, than acting as a lay-figure in a milliner's or dress-maker's establishment. I would advise any woman desirous of entering this profession with the ultimate purpose of managing a gallery, to begin at the very beginning and work her way up. She must understand every step, in order to better direct others. 15

Here, Ward assured her audience that working in a 'portrait gallery' was a safe, pleasant and satisfying occupation, again dropping in the moral potential of the work with regard to setting an example for other women. She presented studio portraiture as a more attractive and lucrative career opportunity than dressmaking and millinery, whilst taking care to align it with these feminised professions.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ward, p. 47.

¹⁶ Dressmaking was consistently the most common type of business to be run by a woman during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Millinery was consistently included in the top ten types of female-owned business .van Lieshout and others, p. 455.

The direction to provide 'assistance with the sitter's toilet' appealed to nineteenth-century gendered expectations that women be skilled in proper deportment and dress, as well as acting as arbiters of taste, exercising an eye for decoration and detail, idiomatically referred to as a 'woman's touch'. Ward, therefore, persuaded her audience that these feminine faculties would logically translate to an aptitude for producing flattering portraits, an analogy which brings to mind John Berger's theory of the 'surveyed female' who is well-versed in transforming herself into what he calls 'an object of vision: a sight'. The logic behind Ward's argument is that if, in Berger's words, a woman 'must continually watch herself', it follows that she would be well equipped to style others, to transform them into an image.

Ward skilfully ensured that she aligned the demands of photographic work with traditionally feminine traits to challenge the legitimacy of male dominance in the profession. For example, Ward asserted women's possession of 'the very essential quality of patience' that was crucial to photographic work and then advanced her argument that:

there is no reason why she should not become successful in photography if she is willing to properly fit herself for it, but she must take it in earnest, and love it well enough to put her own shoulder to the wheel every time. Fitness for it is largely a question of individuality and has nothing whatsoever to do with sex. We see many men who have adopted this profession but who are utterly unable to comprehend more than its lowest requirements, and only succeed in making it a trade, never an art.¹⁸

Ward's assertion that 'fitness' for photographic work 'has nothing whatsoever to do with sex' might seem contradictory given that much of her speech is spent arguing that this is in fact what gives women an advantage in the profession. However, the sentence that follows it makes clear that this claim is intended to contest the male monopoly over photography. By stating that 'many men' fail to elevate photography

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¹⁷ John Berger, Ways of Seeing (London: Pengiun, 1972), p. 47.

¹⁸ Ward, p. 46.

beyond quotidian commercial function, Ward implies that women may succeed. She also implies that art was a status achieved through attention to sentiment – a feminine attribute that men were perceived to lack.

These extracts demonstrate how the household – and the feminised, domestic skillset associated with it – was mobilised by Ward to advocate for women's entry into the photographic profession. Within this comparison between the household and the studio, Ward also made persuasive use of moral sentiments imbedded within Victorian domestic ideology, namely that women should seek to 'improve' not only their own moral character but to act as guides and role models within society, and a photographic career presented an opportunity to carry out this 'duty'. She argued that photography had the capacity to enrich a woman's moral character, unlocking a form of exalted femininity. Speaking specifically about studio portraiture, Ward explained that 'Learning to make the best of people' through exposure to 'the weakest side of human nature' constituted a 'great moral lesson'. 19 By using these conservative gendered orthodoxies, Ward was able to radically challenge the male supremacy within the profession and assert women's eligibility for photographic work. In the next section I draw a link between the discursive tactics that Ward used to encourage women to join the profession and the way that women feminised their photographic practices to establish themselves in the commercial sphere.

Feminine aesthetics and performances in the photographic studio

Late nineteenth-century women photographers' self-fashioning and the public images of their studios reveal the line that they negotiated between adopting various 'masculine' attributes that were necessary to survive in the commercial domain and performing their compliance to gendered norms. Entrepreneurship was considered a male preserve and therefore running a photographic studio as a woman constituted a transgression of feminine respectability, but the risks could be offset by embracing traditional ideas of domesticity and femininity such as those endorsed by Ward. Both

¹⁹ Ward, p. 48.

Alice Hughes and Lallie Charles feminised their commercial activity, presenting it as a service exclusively for women, by a woman/women.²⁰

Alice Hughes (active from 1891) styled herself as a 'ladies' photographer' and made it her 'rule' not to admit men into her studio. ²¹ This strategy enabled her to firstly situate her enterprise as a perceived feminine cloister within the commercial domain and avoid any questioning of propriety (gendered etiquette of the period did not allow unmarried women to meet men alone). It also offered protection against possible accusations of 'encroaching' on the territory of male-run firms. Hughes shrewdly framed her decision to solely photograph women and children as one based on aesthetic preference in her public statements. For example, she told *The Harmsworth Magazine* in 1899 that 'ladies of course make much prettier pictures than do their husbands or brothers'. ²² The pursuit of beauty, an historically feminised aesthetic category, is invoked as justification. ²³

Similarly, Lallie Charles, who set up her studio in 1896 with the assistance of her younger sisters Rita and Isabella Martin, modelled her business on Alice Hughes's and built her reputation as an exclusive photographer of women. Yevonde Cumbers, better known as Madame Yevonde, who was apprenticed to Charles for three years between 1910 – 1913, noted in her autobiography that, '[w]e did not often take men sitters, for Madam [sic] was essentially a woman's photographer'.²⁴ Indeed, a male journalist who visited Charles's studio in 1899 remarked that, 'Men were evidently at a discount in this fair abode of femininity'.²⁵ Charles echoed Hughes in her decision to

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²⁰ This tallies with a broader trend among women entrepreneurs in other trades/professions in this period, such as dressmaking, millinery and other personal services. van Lieshout and others, p. 460. ²¹ Hughes, p. 128.

²² 'A lady photographer who never photographs men', *The Harmsworth Magazine*, vol. 11, 1899 reproduced in *Illuminations: Women's Writing on Photography 1850 - Present*, ed. by Liz Heron and Val Williams (Durham: Durham University Press, 1996), pp. 3–7.

²³ Beauty and the picturesque had been associated with femininity since the enlightenment. Edmund Burke's theory of aesthetics constitutes two gendered categories: the masculine sublime and the feminine beautiful. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1757). The picturesque, which William Gilpin identified as a subcategory of 'the beautiful' was also feminised. See Ann Bermingham, 'The Picturesque and Ready-to-Wear Femininity', in *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape and Aesthetics Since 1770*, ed. by Stephen Copley and Peter Garside (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 81–119 (p. 81).

²⁴ Yevonde, p. 61.

²⁵ Angus McDonald, 'A Lady Artist of the Camera', *The Penny Pictorial Magazine*, 11 November 1899, 437–41 (p. 438).

exclude male sitters by tactfully appealing to artistic sensibility, stating that 'the modern masculine costume is somewhat lacking in artistic lines'.²⁶ Moreover, she justified her decision with appropriately feminine modesty, explaining when asked by journalist Angus McDonald why she did not photograph men that, 'my ambition has not permitted me to soar so high. I am perfectly content at photographing the weaker sex'.²⁷

An aesthetic preference for the female form was not, however, the only reason that Hughes and Charles worked in this way and may even have been something of a ruse. Hughes, known as the 'lady photographer who never photographs men', was also protecting herself from male clients who in general did not respect her authority. ²⁸ Reflecting on her career at the time of her retirement she was much more honest about her 'rule' not to photograph men:

I do not suppose I have photographed more than twenty men all my life, and, to tell the truth, I have never been anxious to. My little experience of them when I did do so make me appreciate how much nicer my own sex were as patrons. Gentlemen, I always found, wanted to upset things so, whereas ladies accept the situation and do not dispute matters. In business matters I must say I find men most tiresome.²⁹

An almost identical reasoning was given by Lallie Charles when speaking to a woman journalist:

'I don't care much for men – as sitters,' and she laughed merrily.

'This is dreadful heresy, I know; but – men are much more difficult to please than women. A rare man is he who thinks he is good-looking, but every man

²⁶ McDonald, p. 440.

²⁷ McDonald, p. 440.

²⁸ 'A lady photographer who never photographs men'; Hughes, p. 128.

²⁹ 'Miss Alice Hughes Talks About Her Sitters: Retirement of a Royal Photographer', *The Evening Telegraph and Post*, 21 November 1910, p. 4.

believes he is distinguished, and that no photograph ever does sufficient justice to his distinction'.³⁰

From these statements we can conclude that both photographers were protecting themselves and their commercial interests from the difficulties that photographing men could entail. Both women deployed modesty and appealed to a 'feminine' concern about beauty to justify their choices. It was a shrewd business decision disguised through an invocation of gendered norms.

Beyond the practicalities of who was admitted into Charles's and Hughes's businesses, femininity was coded into their studio spaces and photographic aesthetics. Yevonde's *In Camera* provides an evocative description of the décor of Charles's studio:

Everything seemed pink in this room. The curtains were of rose-coloured silk, the chairs were upholstered in pink velvet, and a thick-piled carpet covered the floor. Photographs in *passe-partout* hung on wooden stands covered with a black cloth in the centre of the room. Even the photographs were of a soft pinkish tinge.³¹

Yevonde describes Charles's studio as an alluring high temple of femininity. The reader is plunged into a pink, girlish, fantasy world of comfort, luxury and even pleasure as the description of silk, velvet and fluffy carpet appeals to our sense of touch. Yevonde's reader is invited to view Charles's studio as a space where women were flattered and indulged as the photographer worked her magic, producing a gallery of feminine charms. The rosy tone of Charles's prints that Yevonde remarks on became her hallmark. Indeed, both Charles and Hughes before her developed photographic styles based on idealised and nostalgic iterations of femininity.

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³⁰ Annie MacKenzie, 'An Artist in Photography: A Chat with Madame Garet-Charles', *The Windsor Magazine*, November 1897, 688–93 (pp. 691–92).

³¹ Yevonde, p. 46.



Figure 6: Baroness d'Erlanger, Alice Hughes, platinotype, c. 1895, 147 mm x 100 mm, National Portrait Gallery, London.

In 1933 *The Times* wrote that 'Looking through Miss Hughes's volumes of pictures [...] is like opening a window into a slightly unreal, leisured and elaborate world of coronets and feathers, swirling draperies, small heads and waists, and sweet, expressionless faces'.³² The photographer's portrait of the youthful society hostess Baroness d'Erlanger [Fig. 6], certainly has a dream-like quality, and illustrates how Hughes's portraits constructed and celebrated picturesque, highly wrought femininity. The mise-en-scène depicts the Baroness in a leafy bower, her lap strewn with flowers, posed with head tipped to one side, her hand raised to expose a graceful wrist, and wearing a blank expression. Her eminent social status is conveyed through the classical

³² 'Alice Hughes', *The Times*, 4 April 1933, p. 19, The Times Digital Archive.

backdrop and fashionable gown with its elaborate tulle sleeves. D'Erlanger's unadorned neck and bare face bring a freshness, youthfulness and purity to the portrait that, combined with the flowers, evokes a pastoral quality. The fact that Hughes's camera could elevate its subject into the pantheon of rarefied femininity – an upper-class rite of passage – is evidenced by the fictional deployment of a visit to Hughes's studio in Edwardian novels where the heroine would take a sitting with Hughes as a 'necessary incident in her social career'.³³

The other type of portrait in which Hughes and Charles excelled was the mother and child portrait. Women were considered far better photographers of children and families due to their 'natural' maternal aptitude (an ironic assumption as none of the female photographers discussed in this thesis had children, as discussed in the thesis introduction).³⁴ Figure 7 is a photograph by Charles of the Marchioness of Crewe with her infant son, published in *The Tatler* in 1911. Lord Crewe, the caption explained, had three daughters from his first marriage but no male heir until the 'happy event' of his second wife giving birth to a son. This 'charming portrait', The Tatler reported, was the 'first taken' of the precious 'son and heir', but the focus of the image is not the child.³⁵ Rather, the portrait is designed to communicate a refined mode of femininity that was completed through maternity. The Marchioness's elegance and fashionability are conveyed by her elaborate hairstyle, perfectly arranged pearls, stylish dress and an upright, stately posture. Through the controlled posing, she is represented as a doting mother, gazing down at her child, who returns her look with a smile, yet the baby is deliberately held on her lap away from her body, which enables the display of her figure. While the Marchioness appears absorbed by her son, her lowered eyes – suggesting feminine modesty – give the viewer permission to gaze on her beauty. Charles has expertly staged the portrait to celebrate the Marchioness as a highly fashionable and desirable woman and a paragon of maternal triumph.

³³ "Alice Hughes", *The Times*, 4 April 1933, p. 19, The Times Digital Archive.

³⁴ Ida Lemon, 'In Spite of All', *The Girl's Own Paper*, 23 April 1898, p. 466.

³⁵ *The Tatler*, 22 November 1911, p. 223.



Figure 7: Marchioness of Crewe and her son by Lallie Charles, published in The Tatler, 1911.

Femininity was not only being performed by the studio clientele, but also by its workers. These performances can be understood as the female employees' efforts to conform to (or reject) the bourgeois feminine ideal as possessed by the women who patronised the studio. In a fascinating passage from *In Camera* following the description of the potent mix of girlish innocence and excessive, sensual femininity found in Charles's studio, Yevonde narrates her first meeting with Miss Heatherley, who was 'Madam's [sic] secretary and head receptionist, who would take the photographs when Madam [sic] was away'. Yevonde's introduction to Miss Heatherley in her autobiography reveals a tension between the professional work necessitated by the studio (by default coded as masculine, active and productive) and

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³⁶ Yevonde, p. 46.

remaining suitably feminine (an identity that entailed the pursuit of leisure, consumption, and occupation of a passive, even ornamental, role):

Miss Heatherley [...] was extremely proud of her pretty hands. Shaking back her bracelets with a pleasant tinkling sound she would arrange these hands in graceful or striking attitudes. If she took up a pen to write a receipt, it was between the first finger and thumb, with the little finger artistically, if scornfully, elevated, despising as it were, the labour of the other two digits. While writing she would place her left hand on her bosom (which was capacious) and either stroke it seductively, as if in voluptuous endowment of its ample proportions, or else finger the long strings of artificial pearls that she always wore round her throat... or she would hold the string out at full length as if telling her beads like some devout Catholic, but with the little finger crooked and curled and arranged to a remarkable degree. During conversation with no one in particular (one of us girls for example) she had a habit of holding her hands high above her head in order that the blood should run down and leave them white.³⁷

In Yevonde's narrative, Miss Heatherley's hands perform a feminine gestural language of desirability. The booming industrial capitalism of the Victorian period saw workers employed in manual trades described as 'hands,' reducing these individuals to an organ of productivity. In the above passage, the hand – an historically eroticised and fetishised part of a woman's body – becomes a dual symbol of industry *and* femininity. Within the hand itself a conflict is set up between the digits: passive femininity reacts to the vulgar, active 'labour of the other two digits'.

A fixation with various studio employees' hands endures in Yevonde's autobiography. Charles is described by Yevonde as having hands of 'a good shape, plump, white and well cared for'. We learn that a co-worker named Maryan, 'always took the greatest care of her hands [...] sometimes she had to bandage her wrists and

³⁸ Yevonde, p. 48.

³⁷ Yevonde, p. 46.

while developing she never wore less than three pairs of gloves'.³⁹ A Miss Jackson, by comparison,

had long abandoned any hope of keeping her hands in an elegant and charming condition, but sometimes would make desperate efforts to get them to what she called 'respectable'. This happened when she had a 'date.' She would spend the twenty minutes before six o'clock scrubbing at her finger with pieces of cotton-wool that had been dipped in undiluted hydrochloric acid.⁴⁰

The women's hands that *In Camera* features expose the conflict between a standard of femininity that dictates women should have soft, clean, *idle* hands and the messy, manual nature of photographic labour. By a cruel irony, Miss Jackson resorts to the extremes of painful and dangerous skin bleaching with one of the very substances – photographic chemicals – that have left her hands so discoloured in the first place, so as not to offend potential suitors for marriage.

Yevonde, by contrast, recollects her delight as her own hands gradually became filthier, stained black with chemicals. She was proud of the marks of her labour and would go to parties to 'wave [her] hands about in an affected manner and say: "I must apologise for my hands, the nails are too dreadful. It's the chemicals, you know. I'm a photographer"'. ⁴¹ The older, wiser Yevonde presents this gently self-deprecating anecdote about her youthful foibles to amuse. However, this affected display reveals her awareness of the societal obligation for women to have pretty, unlabouring hands and her own rebellion against it; she was proud of work that afforded her independence, but for her more gender (and class) conforming colleagues it was clearly an embarrassment. The remainder of the anecdote perfectly encapsulates the struggle between femininity, respectability and physical labour in women's professionalised practice of photography:

³⁹ Yevonde, p. 56.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Yevonde, p. 55.

My mother was naturally much distressed by this discolouration. 'Surely you can do something about it?' she asked.

'Well I could wear rubber gloves,' I admitted.

'But they always leak. The sharp edges of the plates cut them – besides, what do my hands matter, so long as I become a good photographer?'⁴²

Here, Yevonde's middle-class mother, raised as a Victorian 'angel of the house', clashes with a new mode of femininity defined by a drive for vocation and independence.

The freighted symbol of hands that Yevonde focuses on in her account of working in Charles's studio demonstrates the volatile potential of photographic work to unsettle gendered norms. Miss Heatherley's seductive displays and attention to her appearance buttressed her publicly perceived femininity, compensating for her deviation from the bourgeois ideal of women's economic dependence on men and confinement to the domestic realm. By contrast, Yevonde, an ardent feminist and suffragette, rejected entirely the need to adhere to bourgeois feminine orthodoxy, or what she contemptuously called an 'endless procession of bored, ineffective protected young ladies', disavowing it by embracing a professional identity that had marked her body. Yet such flagrant and public disregard for the codes of femininity risked social stigma, which would not generally have been within women photographers' commercial or personal interests.

While an ostensibly conformist strategy may seem counterintuitive to women's social progress, it was considered highly effective within the arena of feminist politics. Victorian feminists' insistence on 'ladylike' behaviour was 'an acknowledgement of the dominant ideology rather than a demonstration of belief in it', as the historian Rosamund Billington has observed. As we shall see in chapter four, the adoption of socially-conservative appearances were advocated by the Women's Social and Political Union, who, in their campaign for female suffrage instructed activists to dress and

⁴² Yevonde, p. 56.

⁴³ Yevonde, p. 34.

⁴⁴ Rosamund Billington, 'The Dominant Values of Victorian Feminism', in *In Search of Victorian Values: Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Thought and Society*, ed. by Eric M. Sigsworth (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 116–30 (p. 122).

conduct themselves in a feminine manner in order to be more palatable and ultimately persuasive in their politics.⁴⁵ Similarly, this section has demonstrated how women photographers' decisions to deliver their services to women only and the strategic construction of their studios as feminine temples that enshrined ladylike perfection through performance and aesthetics, served to soften their transgression of women's traditional place and societal role. The question of manual or physical labour, and how to disguise its traces, emerged in this discussion as a point of contention for women photographers, as work of this kind was not considered suitably feminine. In the next section, I address the performance of a different kind of labour that was deemed suitably feminine and connected to the domestic realm.

'Making the sitting a pleasure': the photographer as hostess

We have seen that women photographers deployed domestic ideology to create a niche for themselves in a male-dominated industry; in this section, we will see that this also gave them an advantage in terms of the relational labour required by their profession. By 'relational' I refer to the set of actions, customs and affects that constitute what art historian Angela Rosenthal refers to as the 'portrait event': the intersubjective exchange that occurs between the sitter and the photographer. 46 To contextualise this discussion, I first want to consider how the relational dynamics of the 'portrait event' were being examined within the hegemonic artistic discourse of the time, and what concepts were being foregrounded.

On 10th September 1894 the artist Sir Hubert Von Herkomer, then the Slade Professor of Fine Art at the University of Oxford gave a lecture at Cutlers Hall in Sheffield on portraiture, with particular focus on the importance of the artist's ability to know the mind and emotions of his subject. The Sheffield and Rotherham Independent reported on the content of the lecture, noting that it may well have been titled 'Portrait painting psychologically considered', or 'The Psychology of Portraiture'. 47 According to Professor Herkomer, the artist needed to access the

⁴⁵ Katrina Rolley, 'Fashion, Femininity and the Fight for the Vote', Art History, 3.11 (1990), 47–71.

⁴⁶ Rosenthal, p. 46.

psyche of his subject; he stated that '[t]he successful portrait painter [...] has to know his sitter, and to really know him he must be in sympathy with him; in a word, he must be his friend'.48 Eliciting the subject's true character and trust, therefore, through a kind of 'sympathetic' engagement was deemed critical in the process of producing a likeness. Herkomer believed that if an artist cultivated a personality 'at once magnetic and sympathetic' he could penetrate through the 'crust of clothes, manners, etiquette, and a half a dozen other of the concealments of civilization' and 'draw out of the sitter the real man' to make a 'living portrait'. 49 For a portrait to be compelling - synthesising the empirical and the ideal – an artist must '[learn] the character of his sitter, not by his face alone, but by the words of his mouth, the tone of his voice, the soul in his gaze, the turn of his hand'. 50 An intuition, or 'sensitiveness to psychological phenomena', was therefore deemed the defining characteristic of a great portraitist.⁵¹

Occupying the esteemed role of Slade Professor of Fine Art for nine years, Herkomer was highly influential, leading and defining the artistic discourse of the era. 52 Moreover, newspaper coverage of his lectures, like the write up in the Sheffield Independent, meant that his ideas were disseminated beyond the confines of fine art, reaching a broader public. Herkomer's teachings too, had a wide scope as students at his Bushey Art School applied their artistic training to other industries. Eva Le Mesurier and Winifred Marshall, for instance, met as students at Herkomer's Art School and went on to run a successful commercial photographic studio together in London in the 1890s.⁵³ I begin this section with Herkomer and his influence because I am concerned with how ideas that were circulating within 'fine art' portraiture of sympathetic engagement with sitters rippled out to the business of commercial photographic portraiture and consequently impacted women's success in the industry. The notion that women made more sympathetic photographers was often cited in the Victorian

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Lee MacCormick Edwards, Herkomer, Sir Hubert von (1849–1914), Painter and Illustrator (Oxford University Press, 2011) https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/33836>.

⁵³ Miller, 'The Artistic Work of Some Lady Photographers', p. 560.; Grant Longman, The Herkomer Art School, 1883-1900, Bushey Reference Paper Number 1, 1976, Bushey Museum Archives: https://busheymuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Herkomer-Art-School-leaflet-V1.pdf

women's press and has previously been observed by scholars, but this source provides new insight into the historical specificity of the term and its significance within a broader artistic discourse.⁵⁴

Two sources help us to build a better picture of the emotional, psychological and relational labour that studio portrait photography necessitated. The first is an interview with the London Society photographer Stanislaw Julian Ignacy, Count Ostrorog from 1894, wherein he explains the typical challenges that clients' anxieties and foibles posed in portrait sittings (and his frustrations with them). The second source I look at is the Regent Street Polytechnic syllabus, which illustrates how, thirteen years later, the institution was actively preparing photography students to overcome such obstacles by teaching '[s]ympathy between sitter and operator'.

Ostrorog inherited his father's studio run under the alias 'Walery' in London's Regent Street in 1890 and partnered with Alfred Ellis to form the studio Ellis and Walery until 1900.⁵⁵ As a partnership they photographed British royalty and an illustrious cast of late Victorian celebrities. In an interview originally published in *Woman at Home* magazine in 1894, Ostrorog spoke about the difficulty of managing sitters. The interviewer asks, 'I believe you have a great deal of trouble with some sitters [...]?' to which the photographer answers,

Yes! [...] I should think we have. People will not sit as they are asked; they get nervous and excited. So many people say, 'why do you place us in such awkward positions? Let us sit naturally,' forgetting that if we allowed them to sit as they consider naturally, in all probability every part of their body, except the head, would be more or less out of focus. Then there is a stock phrase amongst sitters; how it could have originated I cannot conceive; it never strikes me as either being clever or humorous, and I have heard it so often I am a little weary of it. A sitter will come in and say, 'I hate having my portrait taken. I would far rather have a tooth out'.⁵⁶

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⁵⁴ Rosenblum, p. 75.

⁵⁵ Biography of Walery, National Portrait Gallery:

https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp14017/walery [accessed 23 February 2021].
⁵⁶ 'A Chat with a "Society" Photographer.', ed. by William Thomas Stead, *The Review of Reviews*, 1894,

³⁶ 'A Chat with a "Society" Photographer.', ed. by William Thomas Stead, *The Review of Reviews*, 1894, 156.

This statement tells us that in general people found having their portrait taken to be an unpleasant affair. The rhetorical 'I would far rather have a tooth out' indicates the somewhat agonising nature of the ordeal that existed in the popular public imaginary. Clearly, the photographer's art – which perhaps the Ellis and Walery studio had not quite mastered – lay in neutralising these negative emotions and putting the sitter at ease. Ostrorog's direction of posing was not a comfortable experience for 'so many people' as they felt the posing was contrived.

Fifteen years later and just up the road from Ellis and Walery's studio, the Regent Street Polytechnic sought to mitigate this unpleasantness by teaching their photography students methods for achieving a natural look and building a rapport with a sitter to achieve the best results. Their syllabus covered the following:

Methods of securing good poses spontaneously – Sympathy between sitter and operator - Natural methods of placing hands or arms in position; inducing pose: unconscious imitation - Judicious handling of sitters: fussy sitters, impatient sitters, pliable sitters, etc. – Expression: what is desirable, and how to secure it with various types of sitters – Methods of exposing so as to secure and retain satisfactory expression.⁵⁸

As well as grasping the technicalities of photography, evidently a large part of the formal Polytechnic training involved preparation for the 'handling of sitters'. The ability to influence the behaviour and emotions of the sitter, whether they were 'fussy', 'impatient' or 'pliable', was critical in achieving a flattering portrait. Here, the role of 'sympathy', framed as a connection, or intersubjectivity, between artist and subject, and spoken about so vehemently by Herkomer, was a key component of the Polytechnic's photographic portraiture syllabus. Also notable are the sophisticated relational skills grounded in psychology such as 'unconscious imitation', known

Regent Street Polytechnic Photography Prospectus, 1909/10, RSP/5/4/17, University of Westminster Archives.

⁵⁷ Catherine Weed Ward also noted this and observed that people generally regarded having their portrait taken as 'either a nuisance or a torture'. Ward, p. 48.

sometimes as 'mirroring', whereby the photographer uses their own gestures and body language to 'induc[e] pose'.

In the Victorian period, the propensity for sympathy with others was considered a particularly feminine attribute. ⁵⁹ While relational skills could be taught and acquired for the purpose of professional roles, as they were at the Polytechnic, middle-class women were at an advantage in that they had been taught to possess and perform these attributes from a young age in order to conform to the bourgeois feminine ideal. The mainstream culture of the day affirmed the notion that women excelled at studio portrait photography on account of their sympathetic capabilities. In an 1898 story published in *The Girl's Own Paper*, for example, one of the female characters gazes on a portrait of a child and muses that lady photographers were more sympathetic, and therefore much more successful in taking portraits of children. ⁶⁰

Bearing in mind that this notion was widely accepted, we can consider how this may have in fact proved useful to women photographers and how they could centre it within their practice of studio portraiture. Using Lallie Charles as a case study, in what follows I theorise that women photographers instrumentalised their 'feminine feeling' to generate a unique selling point in a male dominated industry. Drawing on interviews that bookend her career, I consider the way that Charles cultivated a sympathetic professional persona and created a pleasurable experience for her customers.

The first interview was published in *The Windsor Magazine* in 1897 and was written by a female journalist, Annie Mackenzie. The gender of the journalist is relevant because in this article the unique methods of 'lady' photographers and advantages of taking a sitting with them forms the premise for the piece, with a direct comparison to the shortcomings of male photographers from the perspective of a female client. Mackenzie opens her article with a parody of a sycophantic male photographer cajoling a woman to have an expensive panel portrait made because 'they are all the *rage* this year' he remarks slyly. 'Lady Beamish was here last week and

⁵⁹ Rachel Ablow, 'Victorian Feeling', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel* ed. by David (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 193–210 (p. 197). Women's capacity for 'feeling' in the arts has been of recent critical interest in nineteenth-century studies, see Meaghan Clarke, 'On Tempera and Temperament: Women, Art, and Feeling at the Fin de Siècle', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 23, 2016.

⁶⁰ Ida Lemon, 'In Spite of All', The Girl's Own Paper, 23 April 1898, p. 466.

ordered five dozen'.⁶¹ After this cynical sales pitch that plays on women's (especially upper-class women's) perceived competitiveness with their peers and vain desire to be in fashion, the imagined male photographer makes an offensive comment about the woman's ample figure necessitating a panel which will 'get so much more of the figure in'.⁶² He proceeds to criticise her decision for a carte-de-visite sized portrait as 'quite out of vogue'.⁶³ The parody is presented as a monologue wherein the woman's voice is completely silenced by the photographer, indicating her feeling of being stripped of agency by the experience. Having closed the parody of the male photographer with his theatrical capitulation to the woman's wishes – 'Very well, madam. Jones, the small camera!'⁶⁴ Mackenzie follows up this parody with the woman's perspective. 'How one hates the man!' she writes resentfully,

How he fusses round one, patting one's shoulder-puff here and dabbing down a stray curl there, vivaciously trying to show you how much he is giving you for fifteen shillings a dozen! How one rebels against being pictured with a clump of plaster-of-Paris rock for seat (making one feel like Andromeda on her rock) and a dismal screen of painted ocean for background [...] And oh! How one loathes the condescending grimace that accompanies the smirking injunction to look pleasant, hold one's chin up, to fix one's wandering gaze on a particular smudge on a side screen! The one delightful part of a sitting such as this is the excited rush one makes into the street, thanking one's stars that it is all over, and hoping that one's features will not be distorted out of all recognition. Ah, how often we have been through it!⁶⁵

The first thing we might notice is how Mackenzie's description of being photographed tallies with Ostrorog's account of sitters' complaints about the 'awkward' nature of receiving direction. Secondly, the use of the collective 'we' in the emphatic end to Mackenzie's indignant exclamations assumes a sense of solidarity with her imagined

⁶¹ MacKenzie, p. 688. All italics in original in this paragraph

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

female readership. The diatribe was intended to be humorous for readers, and the comedy hinges on the assumption that it resonated with many women who had experienced feelings of humiliation and lack of control when being photographed by a man. Mackenzie continues: 'Think, then, of my delight when I found a photographer — a woman-photographer too — who was human, who treated me as a human being, and who was that rarest of rare things, an artist aswell' [sic]. 66 Mackenzie evidently found that the photographers she had visited in the past (implied as male) were cold and hostile. Charles, on the contrary, was a welcome novelty due to her respectful treatment of clients.

Further on in the interview, MacKenzie expresses her view on male photographers, inviting Charles to share her opinion. Mackenzie writes, 'I ventured to air my *bête noir*, the mere man-photographer, the machine who presses the button, leaving chance to do the rest'.⁶⁷ This aversion to the 'mere' male photographer is grounded in a belief that men worked mechanically, lacking feeling and care.⁶⁸ Charles was in agreement with her interlocuter about the role of gender within the encounter between the sitter and photographer and the ultimate success of the finished portrait. She explained:

that just fits with my own pet theory, that woman, as a rule, prefers to be photographed by woman. You see a strong morning light is horribly realistic; it shows up one's little deficiencies so, or it accentuates the beginnings of a wrinkle here and a crowsfoot [sic] there. Now every woman, be she of the new or old variety, likes to feel that she is being shown to the best advantage — in the presence of a man. Therefore, when she is posed by a critical male, who notes all her little weaknesses of complexion or feature, she feels ill at ease, she loses whatever naturalness she has, and as a consequence the resulting

66 Ibid.

⁶⁷ MacKenzie, p. 689.

⁶⁸ The discourse around the perceived mechanical characteristic of male photographers was mirrored in the United States at this time, see Rosenblum, p. 74.

picture (save the mark!) is more suited to a chamber of horrors than to a Regent Street show-case.⁶⁹

Here, Charles demonstrates her sensitivity to the delicate matter of women's pride, and her understanding that a lack of tact or sympathy for the client's feelings causes them to feel 'ill at ease' and thus the results are far from desirable. In direct contrast to the profile of a typically unfeeling, machine-like male photographer Charles then goes on to discuss her commitment to a practice of studio portraiture that is sympathetic to the sitter and puts them at ease:

And more [...] what does the average photographer know of his sitter? And knowing little or nothing of his subject, how can he make a faithful picture? I never take anyone at the first interview. I like to have my sitters all to myself for a quiet half-hour — over afternoon tea for preference — so that I can pick out their best features, their best side, their most natural pose. Then when they are gone, I turn over in my mind the collection of facts that I have gathered, and I fix definitively what I am to do when they return to face the deadly lens. Heaps of times ladies have said to me when they were going away after having sat, 'How quickly you work! It must be delightfully easy work!' They know nothing of the mental labour that went to make the actual sitting easy and swift.⁷⁰

The type of labour that Charles describes in this account of her practices is a particularly feminised form of labour associated with the domestic sphere. First and foremost, she stresses the importance of getting to know the sitter, presenting the 'average photographer' (male by default) as the unsatisfactory norm and juxtaposing her own personalised and more holistic treatment of sitters against it. She performs

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⁶⁹ MacKenzie, p. 689. Emphasis in original. The same sentiment around women preferring to be photographed by women was also expressed by women customers in the US. Floride Green wrote to Francis Benjamin Johnston expressing her view that 'women naturally feel more at ease in the presence of a delicately refined woman'. Floride Green to Johnston, June 1900, Francis Benjamin Johnston papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. cited in Rosenblum, p. 75.

⁷⁰ MacKenzie, pp. 689–90.

the part of hostess, inviting her clients to tea where they were given personal attention, flattered and covertly scrutinised.

In the extract quoted above, Charles readily acknowledges the amount of 'mental labour' that her practice of photography required. It's worth pausing for a moment to consider the connections between such 'mental labour' and the similarly gendered idea of emotional labour, as defined by Arlie Hochschild. According to Hochschild, emotional labour is labour that 'requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others'. 71 Thus a flight attendant, to use Hochschild's favoured example, must 'perform' cheerfulness and act as the kindly hostess to make customers feel at ease. While the activities of airplane travel and getting one's portrait taken are not equivalent, both have the capacity to induce anxious feelings in those that undertake them, and a reassuring presence is often welcome. Furthermore, reflecting on the gendered nature of emotional labour, Hochschild writes that women have, historically, 'ma[de] a resource out of feeling'.⁷² A woman, Hochschild writes, 'actively enhances other people – usually men, but also other women to whom she plays woman. The more she seems natural at it, the more her labor does not show as labor'. 73 This latter point resonates with Charles's account that sitters commented on how easy her work must be, and her reflection that they were ignorant of how much 'mental labour' was involved. The key point about Hochschild's theory of emotional labour is its grounding within the ideology of domesticity – it is the work of 'mothering' (regardless of whether one is a mother) and taking care of others' needs: the cornerstone of the private, domestic roles that women are conditioned to perform. Hochschild states that, 'The world turns to women for mothering, and this fact silently attaches itself to many a job description'. 74 Charles's sympathetic, relational approach and performance as an attentive hostess were drawn from her lived experience as a middle-class woman whose place in the world had been determined by the dominant ideology of domesticity. Cannily, Charles made a 'resource out of feeling', to use Hochschild's

⁷¹ Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1983), p. 7.

⁷² Hochschild, p. 163.

⁷³ Hochschild, pp. 168–69.

⁷⁴ Hochschild, p. 170.

phrase, capitalising on her emotional dexterity within the commercial marketplace. Essentially, she was appropriating a skillset that had been taught to her with the view of keeping her dependent and tied to the domestic realm in order to engineer her independence from it, as two photographs of her studio made in 1899 attest.



Figure 8: Isabella Martin, Lallie Charles and Rita Martin by Lallie Charles, whole-plate glass negative, c. 1899, National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure 9: Isabella Martin, Rita Martin and Lallie Charles by Lallie Charles, whole-plate glass negative, c. 1899, National Portrait Gallery, London.

Figures 8 and 9 depict Lallie Charles and her sisters Rita and Isabella, both assistants in her studio, taking tea – the ritual so central to Charles's photographic practice. At first glance the sisters appear to be in a fashionable sitting room: the large floor cushions, octagonal Turkish tea table, Japonisme screen and exotic potted palms create an air of orientalism, the in-vogue aesthetic of the fin de siècle. However, on closer inspection it appears that this peculiar array of furnishings are clustered at the back of the room. At the periphery of the photograph's frame, there is an expanse of plain flooring, a rail for a curtain to cover the doors and blinds to manipulate the amount of sunlight coming through the glass roof. These elements reveal that this photograph has in fact been taken in the operating room of the photographic studio.

These portraits were taken for a feature on Charles's studio published in *The Ladies Field* in 1899.⁷⁵ Figure 8 was selected to accompany the article, and it serves a specific purpose: to illustrate the commentary that describes Charles's unique and 'unconventional' practice of portraiture that prioritised informality and comfort.⁷⁶ The tone of these photographs is one of ease and intimacy. Note in figure 8 how Charles lolls her head back in her chair, newspaper resting on her lap, gazing into the lens; Rita stands beside her with a saucer and Isabella, seated on the large bohemian-style cushion, grasps her knee girlishly as she looks at the camera, her face slightly blurred. It is as if the sisters are being captured in their sitting room at home, spontaneously, yet we know they are not. The pictures were staged, constructed to be inviting, an advertisement to convey the relaxed surrounds that a client would be welcomed into, the ritual of tea taking that they would be invited to join, and the charm and warmth of the women who would attend them for their portrait.

The photographs also include a metapicture: a framed portrait of a woman with intricately dressed hair, wearing an elegant white gown, placed on an elaborate easel in the far-left corner of the studio. She looks romantically feminine, characteristic of Charles's distinctive photographic style. While the group portrait of the photographers lounging in their studio 'workshop' promotes the intimate, experiential aspect of a sitting with Lallie Charles, the inclusion of the portrait speaks to the seductive commodity that she produced. It invites the viewer to imagine herself in this space described by the reporter as 'restful' and 'pleasant to the senses', as a guest, and, importantly, as the beautiful woman in the portrait.

The content of *The Ladies Field* article describes the sensitive and soothing professional persona that Charles cultivated and what it felt like to receive her attentions:

Madame Charles's method of treating her subjects is pleasantly informal. First of all, happily for them, she has a charming personality. She looks at you caressingly and approvingly. You feel that you are being 'studied' and yet not

⁷⁵ Anne Morton Lane, 'Madame Garet-Charles on Photography', *The Ladies' Field*, 18 March 1899, pp. 48–49

⁷⁶ Morton Lane, p. 48.

stared at. You know that she is seeing your good points, and carefully avoiding your indifferent ones. [...] She has pretty little hands, with which she caresses a stray lock of hair into place, and you are so pleased when you look at her that you forget all about graceful poses and your 'best expression' and simply feel quite at home and at peace with the world.⁷⁷

Charles is painted as a pacifying, maternal presence in this account, able to reassure and validate her clients with a caressing look. The author of the article concluded that '[t]he result of this very delightful and unconventional method of Madame Garet-Charles is invariably satisfactory'. The fact that Charles possessed the 'magnetic and sympathetic' attributes that Professor Herkomer identified as crucial for success as a portraitist was confirmed in every interview she gave. In 1904 a journalist even used the term 'magnetic' to describe Charles's manner, writing that

there is something soothing and magnetic in her personality, which charms away the nervous little smiles, twitches and mannerisms which affect most people when sitting for their photograph, and she is always patient and good tempered.⁷⁹

The pleasurable experience of being photographed that Charles provided was the antithesis of the torturous ordeal that would have persisted in the nation's cultural memory at this time, where a portrait sitting typically involved the use of head clamps. Even into the 1870s when shorter exposure times did not necessitate absolute stillness on the part of the sitter, having one's portrait taken was typically viewed as grim affair, as demonstrated by figure 10. In this *Punch* cartoon from 1873 the beleaguered 'Mivvins' who apparently doesn't 'take' well is attended to by a male photographer and two male assistants, one of whom manhandles him. The cockney dialect conveyed in the caption characterises the establishment as a 'trade' studio, most likely catering

⁷⁸ Morton Lane, p. 48.

⁷⁷ Morton Lane, p. 48.

⁷⁹ Marion Leslie, 'Some Women Artists in Photography', *The Woman at Home*, 1904, pp. 279–90 (p. 288).

for the lower-middle and working classes, which is presented as humorously at odds with the lofty description of the studio's credentials, which characterises them as 'artists'. In this scene, an assistant is summoned by the photographer to bring the 'Ead-Rest' and a wincing Mivvins is instructed to 'imagine you're welcomin' a friend'. Even at the turn of the century, photographers still used furniture to 'prop' their sitters, creating a rigidity of pose not dissimilar to that produced by head clamps. ⁸⁰ Charles was remarkable because she purposefully avoided such devices in her practice, and instead relied on her 'cheerful' and 'pleasant' personality to relax the sitter, and her 'quick eye' to capture a natural result. ⁸¹

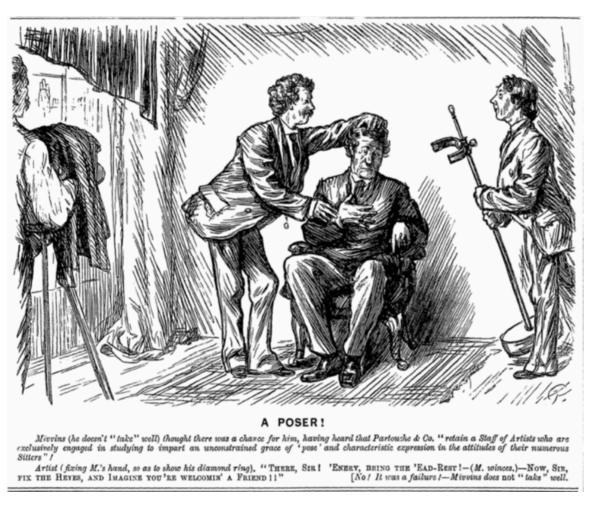


Figure 10: "A Poser!" Punch, vol. 64, 7 June 1873, p. 240.

⁸⁰ 'Photography as a Profession for Women: A Chat with Madame Garet-Charles', *The Young Woman*, 4 August 1899, 414–18 (p. 415).

⁸¹ Ibid.

We have observed that women journalists were eminently at ease in Charles's studio. But did their male counterparts feel the same way? Angus McDonald's interview with Charles, published in the *Penny Pictorial Magazine* in 1899, parallels Annie Mackenzie's in its structure, beginning with a diatribe about photographers' insensitivities and the typically disagreeable nature of a portrait sitting (as vividly illustrated by the above cartoon), only to be won over by Charles. McDonald was excited to exact his 'revenge' on his 'foe' during the interview. He claimed:

I made a vow never to step inside the beauty destroyer's studio again in this life. Imagine my joy, when a glorious opportunity for revenge occurred! I was to actually interview a photographer - to put down in black and white exactly what I thought about photography in general, and his photographs in particular. I would confront him with his own ghastly attempts, wither him with sarcasm, and lay his delinquencies before the world.⁸²

The conceit here is that McDonald was assuming that the photographer would be a man, and was then entirely disarmed on meeting Charles. He wrote: '[t]he words of venom and scathing sarcasm died on my lips. Madame was a charming woman, as charming as her pictures'.⁸³ Again, we hear of Charles's 'charming' professional persona and McDonald described himself as 'completely conquered!' by her personality.⁸⁴ As we know, Charles rarely photographed men, yet for this interview she made an exception and so McDonald experienced her unique methods first-hand. He reports their dialogue: "My good points are few, but I place myself confidently in your hands". "I'll do my best for you," said my fair interviewee sympathetically'.⁸⁵ The fact that McDonald chose to use the adverb 'sympathetically', demonstrates the extent to which Charles deployed this trait as part of her service and professional manner. She then invited McDonald to have tea with her, which, as we learnt from the Mackenzie article, was a key part of her creative method. The journalist went on to report, rather

⁸² McDonald, p. 437.

⁸³ McDonald, p. 437.

⁸⁴ McDonald, p. 438.

⁸⁵ McDonald, p. 439.

giddily, how enamoured he was with Charles and her sisters during this meeting, and certainly did not realise the extent to which he was being scrutinised before he faced Charles's 'deadly lens'.⁸⁶

The practices and persona that Charles adopted ensured her long and successful career. Moreover, as an influential and high-profile photographer, she did much to establish a general consensus in mainstream culture about the greater sense of ease and comfort experienced when visiting a woman photographer's studio, as opposed to a male-run studio. In February 1912, the Daily Mail published an article titled, 'Why women are good photographers: making the sitting a pleasure' in which Charles was keen to highlight men's shortcomings as photographers.⁸⁷ Echoing her thoughts from the 1897 interview, she stated: 'Some men photographers...always make a point of telling a woman exactly what her weak points are when she goes to sit to them, and this reduces her to a state of humility before the operation begins'.88 On the other hand, Charles cited the 'psychological advantage which makes, I think, for women's success in photography. This is that we are always in the habit of making the best of everything'. 89 The notion of 'making the best of everything' dovetails with Hochschild's theory that women are socialised as emotional caretakers, tasked with managing the emotional vagaries of others and improving domestic life. This 'feminine' trait was commercialised by Charles, who realised that the sitter's good humour and comfort was paramount to taking a successful picture. She explained, 'It is simply amazing how much a photographer can do for the success of a sitting by putting the sitter into a good mood'. 90 Charles cited 'woman's cleverness' as the secret weapon, and stated that,

⁸⁶ MacKenzie, p. 690.

⁸⁷ 'Why Women Are Good Photographers: Making the Sitting a Pleasure', *The Daily Mail*, 29 February 1912, p. 9. This article draws on Charles's article 'Why women should excel in photography', which had recently been published in the 'manual' *Every Woman's Encyclopaedia*.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

By it she is able to do so much by suggestion, even more than by speech, in making the sitting a pleasure. Besides, by being in a pleasant frame of mind oneself one does something to ensure the success of the sitting.⁹¹

The skill that Charles identifies here – of 'making the sitting a pleasure' – is a salient example of emotional labour. By ensuring that she is 'in a pleasant frame of mind herself' – performing or suppressing her own emotions to produce an emotional state in the customer – she is able to subtly influence them into feeling relaxed. As we have seen in this chapter, Charles's expert manipulation of her sitters' emotional states through the performance of 'feminine feeling' worked in tandem with the physical surrounds of her studio, which emulated a domestic drawing room. As she summed it up to Annie Mackenzie in 1897: 'I try to make people feel at home – to feel that they are not in a studio. Then they fall into their usual habits of sitting and looking. The rest is – feeling'. ⁹²

Conclusion

This chapter has mapped the ways that women photographers deployed aspects of the gendered constructs that were projected onto them to legitimise, promote and advance their commercial photographic endeavours. This strategy enabled women to claim part of the commercial sphere for themselves and reap its rewards, without raising suspicion that they were a threat to male hegemony. We have seen how women, across progressive and more conservative political positions, instrumentalised gendered orthodoxies of feminine 'duty' and the naturalised feminine propensities for sympathy and hospitality in order to succeed in a male-dominated industry. Lallie Charles, like Alice Hughes before her, predominantly photographed women of the British aristocracy and aligned herself with bourgeois, socially conservative womanhood in her self-fashioning, yet her comment that women's disposition (or, perhaps, duty) to 'make the best of things' gave them an advantage as portrait photographers was pre-figured by Catherine Weed Ward, a proud feminist and

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² MacKenzie, p. 690.

progressive. Ward instructed her audience on the moral virtue to be found beyond the domestic sphere, within the practice of studio portraiture, stating that, '[a] woman will learn a great deal of the weakest side of human nature in a portrait studio, and yet is it not a great moral lesson, learning to make the best of people'. Across the Atlantic, ten years apart and with divergent politics, these influential women were drawing on the same sentiments to make creative and professional progress for themselves and other women.

Similarly to Ward, Charles was vocal in her public endorsement of photography as a profession for women and she was a role model for many young women with aspirations for a photographic career. Her legacy continued through her protégé Yevonde Cumbers, who adopted the title 'Madame Yevonde' in homage to her teacher and became one of the most innovative commercial photographers of the twentieth century. Just as Ward likened the studio to the household and appealed to the familiar, feminised skills that both spaces necessitated, Charles fashioned her studio as a luxurious home away from home over which she presided, performing the part of perfect hostess and making her sitters feel special. In chapter five I examine Charles's photographic aesthetic and popularity in more detail, returning to some of the methods we have discussed here. The feminine charm that Charles cultivated to attract clients did not, however, interfere with her commercial ambition. Aware that women were the primary market for the portrait industry, Charles exercised her selfdescribed 'pleasant but firm' manner to address her male competitors publicly, stating 'I leave the men to the men. And I think the men should leave the women to the women'.94

By way of a closing point, this chapter and the one that follows demonstrate the compromise made by women photographers working at the turn of the twentieth century. To liberate themselves as individuals from a life of reproductive labour as a wife and mother, women like Alice Hughes and Lallie Charles participated in an industry that reproduced the ideologies of the family and the social order that they opted out of personally. We have seen how a strategic, superficial conformity to the status quo on the part of women photographers in fact disguised the scope of their

⁹³ Ward, p. 48.

⁹⁴ 'Photography as a Profession for Women: A Chat with Madame Garet-Charles', p. 417.

ambitions and their resistance to normative societal expectations of middle-class womanhood. While this chapter has examined the strategies that women adopted to succeed as professional photographers and therefore access an alternative lifestyle of economic independence and personal freedom, the next chapter considers just how non-conforming this lifestyle could be beneath the veneer of conformity. I turn now to consider the photographic and domestic partnership of Kate Pragnell and Alice Stewart, who navigated the same trade-off: through their business photographing debutantes and Society ladies they participated in, and contributed to, the dominant culture, all the while resisting it through their unconventional relationship and their vision for an alternative, feminist practice of studio portraiture.

Chapter 3

The Politics of Partnership: Kate Pragnell and Alice Stewart's Practice of Studio Portraiture

This chapter and the one preceding it are linked through their examination of women photographers' day-to-day practices, working dynamics and professional identities that all constitute the conditions of their cultural production. Chapter two showed how, as outliers in the male-dominated photographic industry, women had to develop strategies to succeed. My discussion focused on individual proprietors, in particular Lallie Charles, who performed the part of the hostess, utilising gendered expectations and norms to her advantage. In this chapter and the one that follows I expand this focus, moving out from the individual to map the politics of women's collaborative practice of studio portraiture and then to how women photographers engaged in collective feminist politics.

Kate Pragnell (1853 – 1905) opened a photographic studio at 164 Sloane Street, London, in 1893. Prior to this, Pragnell had worked as an artist, teaching classes at her studio, but when her health began to deteriorate in middle age she was advised to find a new profession and turned to photography.¹ The Kate Pragnell 'Court Studio' came to be described as one of the 'largest sitters' studios in London' and its photographic portraits of celebrated public figures abounded in the leading magazines of the day.² Despite the success and popularity of the Court Studio, its substantial output remains underrepresented in the collections of cultural heritage institutions such as galleries and archives.³ The large body of work credited to the studio is preserved predominantly through reproduction in magazines and as facsimiles attached to copyright registration forms filed by Pragnell, now held at The National Archives in

¹ Ignota, pp. 667–68.

² Ignota, p. 668. Photographs appeared regularly in *The Bystander, Black and White, Cassell's, Country Life* and *Hearth and Home.*

³ Three prints by Pragnell are held by the National Portrait Gallery (NPG x87147; NPGx194346; NPGx38384). The Royal Collection Trust holds one print (RCIN 2912567). The National Trust holds two (NT 887900; NT 638077) and the Hyman Collection holds four postcards of the Chelsea Historical Pageant taken by the 'Kate Pragnell Studio' in 1908 (HC 11362; HC 11364; HC 11361; HC 11363).

Kew. Perhaps partly as a result of this institutional neglect, scholarship on Pragnell is scant. She is granted an entry in the *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland* and is mentioned briefly in Margaret Denny's essay on the better-known photographer Christina Broom, but to date there has been no substantial critical engagement with the work of the Court Studio.⁴ The dearth of research on this studio has meant that the fact that it was jointly run by Pragnell and another woman in a partnership has been overlooked. Alice Mary Stewart (1862 – 1941) joined Pragnell in the photography business in 1894, a year after the studio opened, and they lived and worked together until Pragnell's death aged fifty-two in 1905. At this point Stewart took over the studio and continued to operate as a photographer under the commercial name 'Kate Pragnell' until the outbreak of the First World War.⁵

Using archival sources, this chapter recuperates Pragnell and Stewart's partnership by analysing the conditions of their photographic production and their 'dynamics of mutuality', to borrow a phrase from sociologist Vera John-Steiner's work on creative collaboration. Through this analysis I identify tendencies within Pragnell and Stewart's practice of studio portraiture that we might now understand as feminist and queer. I argue that while overtly conforming to the dominant culture and contributing to the commercial sphere that buttressed it – Pragnell and Stewart pushed against hegemonic norms by embodying and conceiving of an alternative model of living, working, and creating.

In terms of scope and structure, the chapter moves through the private dynamics of collaborative photographic practice to the politics of this mode of working

⁴ Pragnell is mentioned in Margaret Denny, 'Mrs Albert Broom's Interesting "Snap Shot" Postcards', in *Soldiers and Suffragettes: The Photography of Christina Broom*, ed. by Anna Sparham (London and New York: Philip Wilson, 2015), pp. 5–44 (pp. 7–8).; Cheryl Law, 'Kate Pragnell', ed. by Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor, *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland* (Gent and London: Academia Press, 2009), p. 503. Pragnell is missing even from comprehensive studies of women photographers such as Rosenblum's.

⁵ This has caused confusion over Kate Pragnell's dates. For example, the *Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Journalism* leaves a blank for Pragnell's death date and states that it was 'Kate Pragnell' who branched out into photojournalism (hence her appearance in the *Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Journalism*) but my research has found that it was in fact Alice Stewart working under the professional name 'Kate Pragnell'. Pragnell died on 19 November 1905. *Last Will and Testament of Kate Pragnell*, 7 October 1905. Obtained via UK Government Probate Search Service: https://probatesearch.service.gov.uk/Wills [Accessed 4 March 2021].

⁶ Vera John-Steiner, *Creative Collaboration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 3.

within the broader public sphere. I firstly examine the queerness of Pragnell and Stewart's partnership. I consider how through their life-affirming, collective creative endeavour, Pragnell and Stewart quietly resisted the heteronormative expectations placed on women during this period. The section explores the photographers' creative and commercial innovations and how their bond transcended the patriarchal myth of individual genius, instead prioritising collaborative production. In the second part of the chapter, I consider how the commitment to 'co-operative' working practices rippled beyond Pragnell and Stewart's own practice of studio portraiture. Presenting at the International Congress of Women in 1899, Pragnell set out a vision for an alternative practice of studio portraiture and photographic training for women, that I argue were grounded in feminist and socialist principles. I analyse Pragnell's speech and contextualise her proposal by examining her and Stewart's connections to (and influence within) the leftist political milieu of turn-of-the-century London where radical ideas circulated. This chapter shows, therefore, how their shared practice of studio portraiture had far more complex ambitions and dimensions than the production of commodities to satisfy the bourgeoisie. I posit that Pragnell and Stewart made commercial photographic practice into a political tool – it gave them the freedom to live otherwise, and they wanted to extend this freedom to other women.

'Bent on new discoveries': queerness, commerce and innovation

The tendency of late-Victorian publications to use the singular name 'Kate Pragnell' to credit photographs produced by the studio that Pragnell and Stewart jointly ran problematises an understanding of the business set up. Pragnell also handled the studio's public relations and, perhaps because it was established in her name, interviews were titled as solely with her, even if Stewart was a contributor. These factors speak to the enduring cult of the individual within artistic production and have likely impacted on the historicisation of the studio, namely how Stewart's role was subsequently minimised in the scant scholarship that exists. However, close scrutiny of

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⁷ For example Leily Bingen, 'An Artistic Lady Photographer: A Chat with Miss Kate Pragnell', *The Young Woman*, 6 December 1901, pp. 73–76. Fred Miller also refers to Pragnell as independent in Miller, 'The Artistic Work of Some Lady Photographers', p. 560.

archival documents such as press coverage of the business, advertisements for its services, copyright lines on prints and legal documents show that Pragnell and Stewart were in fact business partners.⁸ For example, in the 1890s the business was advertised as the 'Studios of Kate Pragnell & Co' [my emphasis] and prints were authored 'Kate Pragnell and Co., The Lady Photographers: Court Studios'.⁹ Pragnell referred to Stewart as her 'friend and partner' in her Will when bequeathing Stewart the majority of her sizable estate.¹⁰ The dual terms that Pragnell used to describe her relationship to Stewart in her Will are revealing, as they indicate the women's enmeshed personal and professional lives. In interviews and other public forums Pragnell used the terms 'friend' and 'partner' interchangeably to describe Stewart, by turns signifying personal intimacy and professional formality. The intertwining of these different facets of their relationship is particularly apparent in an interview with *The Young Woman* magazine titled 'An Artistic Lady Photographer: A Chat with Miss Kate Pragnell' in 1901.

Following the Court Studio's move to a new, larger premises, a journalist named Leily Bingen paid the photographers a visit. *The Young Woman* was a magazine that encouraged 'the development of independent and active young women' and regularly featured articles on independently-minded women (including women's rights campaigners such as Clementina Black and Olive Schreiner) who were held up as role models, which was clearly the purpose of this interview. ¹¹ The interview is worth exploring in depth for the insight it provides into Pragnell and Stewart's collaborative practice of studio portraiture, and the picture it paints of the intimacy that existed between these women. Bingen opens the interview:

⁸ The Stage, 5 July 1894, p. 11. The reporter recounts being 'shown some really capital photographs at the Court Studio, 164 Sloane Street, where Miss Pragnell and Miss Stewart hold sway [...] These clever ladies seem to do artistic work in every branch of photography.'

⁹ The latter copyright line features on the Royal Collection Trust's portrait of Lady Georgina Cowell (RCIN 2912567).

¹⁰ Last Will and Testament of Kate Pragnell, 7 October 1905. Obtained via UK Government Probate Search Service: https://probatesearch.service.gov.uk/Wills [Accessed 4 March 2021]. Stewart was an executor of Pragnell's Will, along with Pragnell's cousin William Henry Heyman. Pragnell left Stewart around £2025, an amount equivalent to £251,796.77 in today's money. Calculated using the Bank of England's Inflation Calculator: https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator [Accessed 2 July 2021]. On the census returns of 1901 both women described themselves as working on their 'own account' (as in self-employed) as photographers, which indicates the equality of the partnership. Census Returns of England and Wales, 1901. Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives, 1901, Class: RG13; Piece: 34; Folio: 22; Page: 35.

¹¹ Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green, and Judith Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 167.

In Brompton Square, in the heart of that populous side of London, and yet quietly set back amid green trees, stands a roomy house where Miss Kate Pragnell and her partner have recently established themselves, finding it a delightful change from their former premises in Sloane Street, where they only had their studio, whereas now, while certain rooms are given up to their profession, the rest of the house is their pretty and tasteful home.¹²

The interview that follows illuminates how Pragnell and Stewart's domestic, professional and artistic lives were bound up together. At the beginning of the interview, Pragnell reflects on setting up her studio in 1893, and notes that a year later 'my friend, Miss Stewart, came to me, and since then we have worked entirely together'. Pragnell's emphatic phrasing of 'entirely together' indicates the day-to-day proximity, joint decision making and the equality of the partnership. The delegation of studio duties is then elucidated as Pragnell states that 'Miss Stewart looks after all our business matters, as well as doing the camera work, and is quite invaluable'. Pragnell elaborates on the nature of the two women's working lives, detailing the productivity, artistic fulfilment, and contentment of their partnership:

I believe we are both happiest when dabbling with our chemicals and bent on new discoveries, which reminds me that in the present year we have achieved our record in this way, touched the apex of our ambition and invented a process which is all our own, and absolutely unique.¹⁵

Here Pragnell gives an account of *literal* chemistry – as in experimentation with photographic processes – but also the chemistry between the partners. Pragnell's words convey the creative energy and productivity of their collaboration: they have 'achieved their record' and 'touched the apex of [their] ambition'. The 'Chiaroni

¹³ Bingen, p. 74.

¹² Bingen, p. 73.

¹⁴ Bingen, p. 74.

¹⁵ Bingen, p. 74.

process' Pragnell goes on to explain to Bingen, 'is a word made out of chiaroscuro, and which is our registered name, belonging wholly and solely to us'. ¹⁶ The phrasing Pragnell uses indicates the sense of joint ownership, through her use of the term 'belonging'. It seems very important to the partners that they share something special and unique, which others cannot have. Chiaroni is 'all our own', theirs 'wholly and solely'. Pragnell conveys her and Stewart's shared pride and possessiveness over their invention, almost as if it were their child – it has even been named and registered, just like a birth. If, as theorist Calvin Thomas argues, the word 'queer' 'has torque and twist in its etymological background' then we might say that Pragnell and Stewart torque, twist, or even queer the concept of reproduction, turning it away from biology and towards their collaborative photographic innovation.¹⁷

It is important to pause here to clarify my use of the term 'queer'. While I am aware of the problematics of anachronistic applications of terminology to historical subjects, 'queer' is a capacious term that encapsulates a spectrum of identities and modes of existence that exist in oppositional relation to the heterosexual norm. It is a useful critical framework that helps us locate and navigate what Eve Sedgwick calls 'the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically'. 18 Pragnell and Stewart's erotic and romantic lives are inaccessible to us and, in fact, irrelevant to the discussion at hand. Rather, I hope to show, more elastically, that by teasing apart Pragnell's and Stewart's partnership what emerges is a narrative of female kinship, intimacy, creative collaboration and cultural production that strived for innovation and advancement. These characteristics can be understood as gueer because they exemplify a resistance to societal categories, gendered roles and the (hetero)normative expectations of the period that women would become wives and mothers.

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¹⁶ Bingen, p. 74.

¹⁷ Calvin Thomas, 'On Being Post-Normal: Heterosexuality After Queer Theory', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory*, ed. by Michael O'Rourke and Noreen Giffney (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 17–32 (p. 17).

¹⁸ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 8.

Although *The Young Woman* interview is sub-titled 'A Chat with Miss Kate
Pragnell' it is not a single-voiced interview. As Bingen is shown around the studio Alice
Stewart is introduced and feeds into Pragnell's explanation of the Chiaroni process in
the way familiars will interrupt each other and embellish anecdotes of shared
experience:

'Miss Pragnell and I half killed ourselves before we evolved Chiaroni,' put in Miss Stewart from her desk, where she sat busy writing. 'It is a case of chemistry and art combined, the result producing an atmospheric perspective never before obtained, and which enables us to make a subject picture of every sitter. As soon as possible we hope to have a special show of this new method, but we have been so busy since we came here.' 19

Not only does this explanation provide us with an insight into the intimate nature of Pragnell and Stewart's partnership, but also about their ambitions for their 'Chiaroni' process. The partners invented it to elevate the studio portrait to the status of a 'subject picture', meaning an artwork with aesthetic value, as opposed to a more functional and domestic record of an individual. It was evidently highly technical and the terminology that the partners use to describe it demonstrates the advanced level of their knowledge as well as skills. Stewart states that the goal of Chiaroni was to produce an unprecedented type of 'atmospheric perspective', a term relating to the artistic method of creating the illusion of depth using colour, acuity and chiaroscuro.²⁰ Pragnell was, after all, a trained painter and therefore could transfer her knowledge of the chiaroscuro 'principle' of manipulating light and shade in fine art to model a figure photographically within pictorial space.²¹

Although the method was used with regularity by the studio after 1901, extant portraits by Kate Pragnell and Co. that explicitly state they were produced using Chiaroni are rare. The process did not lend itself well to reproduction, according to

¹⁹ Bingen, p. 74.

²⁰ Janis Callen Bell, *Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 2003)

https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T066570>.

²¹ Pragnell was also a talented miniature portrait painter. Ignota, p. 676.

Pragnell, so they cannot be found in publications.²² This aversion to reproduction of photographs made with the Chiaroni process, combined with the overtly aesthetic principles of the technique and the aspiration to hold a 'special show of this new method', are indicators that Pragnell and Stewart wanted to distance themselves from commercialism and align their practice with artistic photography. At this time, the Pictorialist movement was flourishing across Europe and the United States. In Britain, The Brotherhood of the Linked Ring, an exclusive international club of male photographers, occupied the vanguard of fine art photography with their Pictorial work.²³ Photographers working in this style tried to make their photographs look as much like paintings as possible, therefore a fetishistic emphasis was placed on the optical and material properties of the photographic print, which was intended for display in a gallery or the home as opposed to reproduction in books or magazines. The printing process, selection of paper and nuances of colour were paramount. As the photographic historian Margaret Harker observed, the exhibition print was 'an integral part of the aesthetic of photography, more so than at any other period in its history'.²⁴ The Pictorialists strove to transcend the mechanical nature of the medium, and Pragnell aligned her (and Stewart's) practice with this agenda, explaining to The Woman at Home in 1901 that 'my whole object is to produce by mechanical means an artistic effect'. 25 The aims of the Chiaroni invention were multi-faceted. By applying properties of fine art photography to their commercial portraiture Pragnell and Stewart created a unique product within the market. The profitmaking objective of Chiaroni is confirmed by the photographers' choice to patent the method. However, Pragnell and Stewart's goals exceeded a straightforward business strategy as they exhibited Chiaroni portraits publicly to attract the critical acclaim of the art establishment. When shown examples of Chiaroni portraits in the studio Bingen waxed lyrical about the effect that avoided the 'flatness' typical of much commercial studio portraiture, and Pragnell explained that art critics of the period believed the technique

²² Bingen, p. 74.

²³ Gertrude Käsebier became the first woman member in 1900. Stephen Petersen, 'Gertrude Käsebier', ed. by John Hannavy, *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 790–91.

²⁴ Margaret Harker, *The Linked Ring: The Secession Movement in Photography in Britain, 1892 - 1910* (London: Heinemann, 1979), p. 107.

²⁵ Ignota, p. 669.

to be an 'extraordinary thing'.²⁶ Above all, Stewart and Pragnell aspired to 'raise the standard of photography in the direction of the highest art' with Chiaroni, an aim that mirrors the fundamental Pictorialist agenda of elevating photography to the status of fine art.²⁷

Figures 11 and 12 are, to my knowledge, the only extant examples of portraits produced with Pragnell and Stewart's Chiaroni process. Dating from the early 1910s, they are identifiable through the copyright statement about the process on the prints' versos. ²⁸ In the photograph of Violet Agar-Robartes [Fig. 11] the balance of light and shade sculpts the sitter with subtlety and naturalism, rather than applying a dramatic, baroque-era tenebristic style that we might expect from a process named after the principle of 'chiaroscuro'. There is a distinctive painterly quality to the portrait through its gradations of brown tones and its pictorial depth. Observable in the portrait of Judge Arthur Wolfe Chomey [Fig. 12] is the way that the focus has been manipulated to create a shallow depth of field. The sitter appears in sharp focus and is brought closer into our vision; behind him space recedes with reduced clarity, producing the 'atmospheric perspective' that Stewart spoke about.

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²⁶ Bingen, p. 74.

²⁷ Ignota, p. 676.

²⁸ Technically they are examples of Stewart's work, as Pragnell died in 1905, but the process was of course developed in partnership.



Figure 11: The Hon. Violet Agar-Robartes by Kate Pragnell, photographic paper, c. 1910, 201 mm x 133 mm, Lanhydrock, Cornwall, © National Trust / Jeannette Scott & John Browning



Figure 12: Judge Arthur Wolfe Chomey by Kate Pragnell, 1911, State Library Victoria, Australia.

Kate Pragnell felt that her professional identity was first and foremost as an artist and then as a photographer, so it is unsurprising that she was very keen to apply her artistic skills and knowledge to her practice of studio portraiture.²⁹ She explained in an interview with *The Woman at Home* conducted in 1901 that the 'whole object [was] to produce by mechanical means an artistic effect'.³⁰ However, it is important not to assume that Pragnell's professional training and identity as an artist made her the partner with the 'ideas' with Stewart acting as technical and pragmatic counterpart. Although Pragnell – ten years older than Stewart and with a formal

²⁹ In the census of 1901, Pragnell is recorded as an 'artist and photographer'; Stewart is listed as 'photographer'. *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1901*. Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives, 1901, Class: RG13; Piece: 34; Folio: 22; Page: 35.

³⁰ Ignota, p. 669.

artistic education – had trained her partner when they first met, there was evidently an equal delegation of duties and responsibilities within the business. Stewart and Pragnell's investment in the ambitions and ethos of their practice of studio portraiture was demonstrably mutual. Speaking about process of capturing the 'intangible quality' of idiosyncratic beauty within sitters Pragnell told the reporter that '[t]o get this inexplicable something, we are artists in our studio work' [my emphasis].³¹

Stewart and Pragnell's lives were intertwined domestically, as well as artistically. In the *Young Woman* interview Stewart goes on to discuss the arduous move from 'business and private premises, the one previously separate from the other, and keeping the studio going the whole time'.³² The census returns of 31 March 1901, the year of Bingen's article, shows that by that date Pragnell and Stewart were living as well as working at 39 Brompton Square. While the Court Studio operated at 164 Sloane Street in Chelsea between 1893 – 1900 Pragnell and Stewart cohabited at 90 Prince of Wales Road along with another woman named Emily Bird.³³ Pragnell and Bird had previously resided together at 13 Bath Road in Chiswick: they are recorded on the 1891 census return form, their names bound together by a curly bracket, as 'living conjointly' with one domestic servant, indicating equality.³⁴

As successful businesswomen Pragnell and Stewart had the means to live privately in a rented or owned house, and therefore to establish their own 'household'. Female professionals in this period tended to rent rooms in boarding houses or in more upmarket communal blocks such as the 'Ladies Residential Chambers' that were established as a solution to the lack of suitable accommodation for single professional women or those of 'independent means'. In these arrangements it was common for female friends to share accommodation. The typicality of professional women living communally, coupled with the fact that female

³¹ Ignota, p. 676.

³² Bingen, p. 74.

³³ London, England, Electoral Registers, 1832-1965, London Metropolitan Archives. Source: www.ancestry.com [accessed 5 January 2018].

³⁴ Census Returns of England and Wales, 1891; The National Archives of the UK (TNA); Kew, Surrey, England; Class: RG12; Piece: 1034; Folio: 86; Page: 38; GSU roll: 6096144. Census Returns of England and Wales, 1901. Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives, 1901. Class: RG13; Piece: 34; Folio: 22; Page: 35. Pragnell is described as 'head' of the household with Stewart and Bird described as 'friend'.
³⁵ Deborah L. Parsons, Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 111–12. Alice Zimmern, 'Ladies' Dwellings', Contemporary Review, 77, 1900, 96–104.

homosexuality was not as aggressively policed as male homosexuality following the Wilde Trials, meant that the cohabitation of unmarried women was socially acceptable.³⁶ Indeed, the fact that *The Young Woman* openly presented Pragnell and Stewart's intimate – even *idyllic* – domesticity shows how far from suspicion their lifestyle was situated.

Beyond the acceptability of same-sex domestic arrangements, the cultural theorist Sharon Marcus argues in Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England that intimate and even sexual relationships between women were accepted within Victorian heteropatriarchal culture. She writes that 'female marriage, gender mobility, and women's erotic fantasies about women were at the heart of normative institutions and discourses, even for those who made a religion of the family, marriage and sexual difference.'37 Between Women illustrates the broad spectrum of accepted forms of female intimacy within Victorian culture and complicates the binary of normative heterosexuality and the deviance of homosexuality in this period. We might think then, that if relationships between women were culturally-sanctioned under the understanding that they could work, according to Marcus, 'in tandem with heterosexual exchange and patriarchal gender norms' and that this leniency would also, by accident, protect women who deviated from the heterosexual norm (i.e., who resisted marriage and children all together).³⁸ Women who lived together in a romantic partnership could be considered to be 'friends' or 'companions', even in the most intimate terms, and not raise eyebrows, as Bingen's article demonstrates. But what did it mean for women to live outside of this heteropatriarchal system, running their own businesses and being financially independent, creating a desirable artistic, cultural and commercial product, as opposed to engaging in reproductive labour? I suggest we might think of Pragnell and Stewart as offering a photographic counterpart to the queer literary partnerships analysed by scholars like Jill Ehnenn. As Ehnenn argues, women who were 'living,

³⁶ See Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 21–35.

³⁷ Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 13.

³⁸ Marcus, Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England, p. 21.

working and having primary relationships outside of the patriarchal norm' were betraying the 'social politics of heteronormativity'.³⁹

The paradox is that Pragnell and Stewart made their living by producing the very visual culture that buttressed the social politics of heteronormativity, including its institutions and rituals. Three years after Pragnell and Stewart had established their studio Kate Pragnell and Co. became the unofficial resident photographer for Hearth and Home magazine, producing portraits of debutantes and Society ladies dressed to attend court and be presented to the Queen. Figure 13 is just one example of countless pages from the period 1896 – 1900 in which all of the photographs reproduced on a page are credited to Kate Pragnell. Figure 13 shows photographs of nine women aged from adolescence to middle age with their names printed underneath their portraits. Each woman wears an elaborate white gown (except one, who wears black for mourning) with a feathered plume and veil and clutches a large bouquet. Compositionally, the portraits are very similar: each woman is standing in front of a backdrop with a classical column trailing flowers. She occupies roughly the same position in the photograph's frame, her body positioned at an angle to the camera. I refer to these images as 'portraits', which of course was their intended format, however in this context they function more like fashion plates as our attention is directed to the women's attire through the feature title 'Dresses from the last drawing room'.

³⁹ Jill R. Ehnenn, *Women's Literary Collaboration, Queerness, and Late-Victorian Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 5, 17.

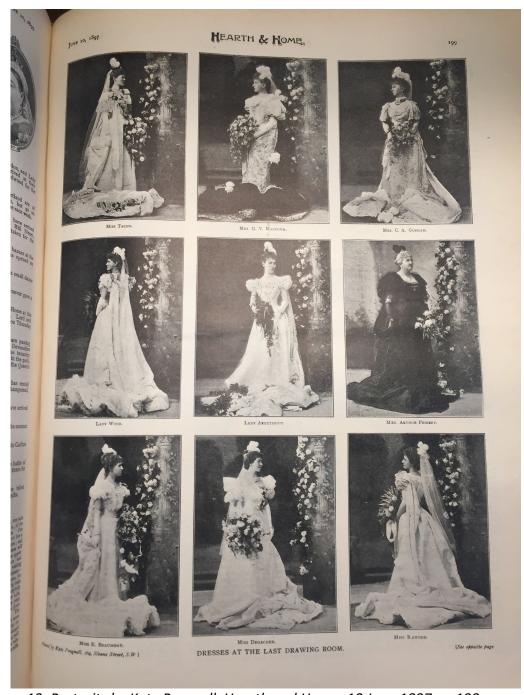


Figure 13: Portraits by Kate Pragnell, Hearth and Home, 10 June 1897, p. 199.

Despite the rote quality of the portraits themselves, Pragnell and Stewart's work for *Hearth and Home* exemplifies their ingenuity and commercial acumen as women photographers working in a male-dominated industry. Celebrity culture was proliferating in the 1890s with the explosion of the illustrated press, and a large part of *Hearth and Home's* content was an aspirational focus on the lives of upper-class women. The press attention was largely welcomed by women from the upper echelons

as it shored up their power and influence (as well as spot lighting debutantes entering the marriage market) at a time when the aristocratic world they belonged to was being threatened with replacement by a more democratic and modern social order. Stewart and Pragnell responded to this set of conditions by devising a strategy to generate business for their studio and ensure a monopoly over the share of photographs in the magazine by placing advertisements in *Hearth and Home* for free sittings to 'any ladies wishing to be photographed in their Drawing Room Dresses for publication in Hearth and Home'.40 Thus Pragnell and Stewart created a closed loop, attracting clients through marketing and profiting from the rights to their images all within the economy of the magazine. It was a mutually beneficial arrangement that ensured a reliable income and steady stream of customers for them throughout the social season and free 'exposure' for the sitter who had her photograph reproduced in the magazine. When visited by Leily Bingen the photographers reported being kept very busy with the procession of women wanting their portrait taken. 41 The formulaic nature of the results in comparison to other works in the photographers' oeuvre confirms that quantity was the primary objective.

As well as producing portraits of wealthy women attending Court for regular features on fashion and Society gossip, Kate Pragnell & Co. also produced portraits of engaged or newlywed couples for *Hearth and Home*'s 'Marriage and Giving in Marriage' page, a regular feature written by 'Cupid' that affirmed and celebrated the institution of marriage within the social elite as powerful families and their fortunes joined together. Unlike their competitors Alice Hughes and Lallie Charles, discussed in the previous chapter, Kate Pragnell and Co. did accept male clients so could offer their services to both the bride and groom. *Hearth and Home* appear to have been heavily invested in the reputation of the Court Studio, which bolsters the interpretation of Kate Pragnell and Co. as the magazine's unofficial photographer. As early as 1895 the editors corrected a journalist who had recently stated that there was only one 'lady' photographer working in London (Alice Hughes), with reference to Kate Pragnell whose 'beautiful work is too familiar to readers of *Hearth and Home* to need

⁴⁰ 'NOTICE', *Hearth and Home*, 27 February 1896, 584, 19th Century UK Periodicals.

⁴¹ Bingen, p. 75.

encomium'.⁴² Moreover, as we saw in chapter one, when individual women or girls wrote to *Hearth and Home* looking for advice on where to find photographic training Kate Pragnell was always highly recommended. Likewise, when it came to recruiting studio apprentices, Pragnell and Stewart did this through the magazine's employment bureau, where the editor recommended how advantageous such a position was to its readership.⁴³

Kate Pragnell and Co.'s 'Chiaroni' process and the professional alliance with Hearth and Home demonstrate the fluidity between the 'artistic' and 'commercial' elements of the photographers' practice and pose a challenge to the binary discourse of the time around aesthetic or 'art' photography and commercial photography, its poor relation. With Stewart and Pragnell, the partners' artistic experimentation developed alongside the commercial work; they were inextricable. And what is more, that innovation was made possible through the peculiarities of their partnership. In the interview for The Woman at Home in 1901 Pragnell explained that 'I myself, assisted by my friend Miss Stewart, always make a point of taking every sitter. It would be impossible for us to hand over the work to anyone else, for I rely upon [...] our methods of working together, to secure the most pleasing and satisfactory photographs of each sitter'. 44 Here, referencing their unique 'methods', Pragnell affirms the value of the mutuality, affinity and the finely tuned gestural and intuitive communication on which the partnership was based, and how the success of the sitting was dependent on this dynamic. Throughout the interview with Bingen it is notable that Pragnell and Stewart speak collectively, referring to their joint pursuit using the terms 'we', 'ours', 'us'.

The fertility of Pragnell and Stewart's commercial, artistic and domestic partnership is commented on by Bingen at the close of *The Young Woman* article:

In spite of the constant pressure of a flourishing business it is an almost ideal life the two friends lead in their home, both devoted to their profession, with absolutely the same tastes and an enthusiastic desire to raise photography

⁴² Hearth and Home, 15 August 1895, p. 483, 19th Century UK Periodicals.

⁴³ Pandora, 'Our Employment Bureau', p. 539.

⁴⁴ Ignota, pp. 672–73.

higher and higher and to win credit, not by blindly copying the successes which others have won in this particular field, but in striking out new paths for themselves.

Bingen's use of the plural is key here. Pragnell and Stewart's life together is presented as idyllic and the 'devotion to their profession' indicates their shared passion for their work. It is a paragraph that indicates unquestioningly the ambition, enthusiasm, innovation and joy of their partnership. What is more, they are 'striking out new paths' and challenging the status quo.

The equality, artistic affinity and interdependence of Pragnell and Stewart's partnership presents a counterpoint to the conventional operation of the photographic studio within industrial capitalism whereby those who contributed to the production of the portrait commodity were alienated from it through the subdivision of labour. Pragnell and Stewart's commitment to practicing a more co-operative form of studio portraiture and the importance of experiencing creative fulfilment through, and connection to, one's labour and its product is confirmed in a speech that Kate Pragnell gave on the subject of women in photography in 1899.

Co-operative politics and a new model of photographic practice for women

In July 1899, Kate Pragnell was invited to speak at *The International Congress of Women* in London on the subject of professional photography. This was the third event held by the International Council, a body established in 1888 in Washington DC, to 'provide a means of communication between women's organisations in all countries' and 'to provide opportunities to meet together from all parts of the world to confer upon questions relating to the welfare of the commonwealth and the family'. The leader of the constitutional suffrage movement in Britain, Millicent Garrett Fawcett, was the Council's first president. While the initial aims of the Council placed women as guardians and spokespeople for the institution of the family (and therefore were not particularly progressive on labour issues), by the second meeting in

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⁴⁵ F. M. Butlin, 'International Congress of Women', *The Economic Journal*, 9.35 (1899), 450–55 (p. 451).

1893 women workers from thirty countries were present. By 1899, the aim of the Council was to cultivate an international 'solidarity' between women and to discuss how they lived and worked across twenty-seven nations. At this congress, most of the discussion centred on the economic aspects of women's lives, and the professional opportunities and technical education available to them. Questions of female labour were the focus of the 'Legislative and Industrial' section, which addressed questions on 'Special Labour Legislation for Women,' 'Special Labour Legislation for Children,' 'Scientific Treatment of Domestic Service', 'Civil Disabilities of Women,' 'The Home as Workshop,' 'Trade Unionism,' 'Ethics of Wage- Earning,' 'Co-operation and Profit Sharing.'46 Radical Marxist feminists such as Clementina Black were in attendance, and F. M. Butlin, who covered the congress in *The Economic Journal* reported that Black's speech on domestic service was the most interesting of the event. The article reports that 'many practical remedies' were suggested to reform what Black described as the 'tyranny' of the domestic service system that oppressed women of the working classes.

Such points of discussion and Black's prominence at this event show that the International Congress of 1899 was a forum where middle-class women came together to critique their own societal positions and those affecting their working-class sisters. It was a space where new ideas to better women's experiences and social positions were voiced and debated and practical solutions for change were formulated. Butlin commented that in discussions on women worker's rights 'it was particularly stimulating for the workers of the different countries to hear how one country had already taken the step they were themselves contemplating' and cites the examples of better working conditions for women, a minimum wage and even equal legal rights for men and women. Butlin notes that '[d]uring this Congress the International Council entered on a new phase of its existence'.47 It was, therefore, of great significance that Pragnell was there to represent women working in the photographic profession at this landmark moment for first-wave feminist politics in Britain.

Each speaker was invited to present at the International Congress because they were an authority on their given subject and successful in their field and were in a

⁴⁶ Butlin, p. 452.

⁴⁷ Butlin, p. 454.

position to give advice for the benefit of other women. Pragnell spoke in the 'Special Aptitude of Women for Handicrafts' section, alongside presentations from influential figures in the Arts and Crafts movement: May Morris, the prominent socialist, feminist and embroidery designer, and daughter of William Morris, and the stained-glass designer Mary Lowndes, who later became heavily involved with the suffrage movement, founding the Artists' Suffrage League in 1907. Catherine Weed Ward, the great advocate for women in photography whose activism was examined in the previous chapter, was a panellist in the discussion following papers by Pragnell, Morris and Lowndes. The significance of the meeting of these women and their sharing of a platform will be discussed later in this chapter, after a consideration of the content of Pragnell's speech.

The paper Pragnell delivered at the International Congress gained national press coverage and was later published in the volume *Women in Professions* by the Countess of Aberdeen, a prolific women's rights activist and social reformer, of whom Pragnell would, four years later, make a portrait of with her dogs [Fig. 14].⁴⁸ Pragnell's speech addressed three areas: the 'practical business of photography', 'the object of a photograph' and 'the artistic part of the work'.⁴⁹ Most relevant for my purposes in this chapter is the practical part of the speech that focuses on the benefits of collaborative working practices and Pragnell's vision for a co-operative studio run solely by women to raise the standard of photography, improve workers' physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing and give them economic security.

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⁴⁸ The Congress gained coverage in the national press, with *The Evening Telegraph* commenting that the subjects covered were of 'pressing importance' and 'popular curiosity'. *The Evening Telegraph*, 21 July 1899, p. 6. Kate Pragnell registered this portrait for copyright at Stationer's Hall in January 1903. National Archives: COPY 1/459/183, The National Archives, Kew.

⁴⁹ Kate Pragnell, 'Photography', in *The International Congress of Women, London, July 1899, Women in Professions*, ed. by The Countess of Aberdeen (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1900), pp. 202–4.



Figure 14: Countess of Aberdeen by Kate Pragnell, 1903, Copyright Registration form, The National Archives, Kew.

The speech opens with a discussion of the degraded state of commercial photography, to which Pragnell 'distinctly object[ed]' and did not 'consider suitable in any way for educated women'. Here Pragnell establishes the unsatisfactory status quo in the photographic industry, which allows her to then set out her own alternative model. She then states that:

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⁵⁰ Pragnell, p. 202.

At present I fear there is no high-class artistic business conducted and worked entirely by women, where ladies can train and learn each branch of the business. In my own small way, I employ only women, and Miss Stewart and I work hard in the business.⁵¹

Pragnell refers to her own efforts to support women to join the ranks of the photographic profession by making a policy of only employing women and citing her own close working practice with Stewart. She laments the fact that there is no business where ladies can 'train and learn each branch of the business', affirming the importance of a space exclusively for women as paramount for them to carve out a space within a male-dominated field — and be supported and protected in doing so.⁵² As we saw in chapter one, most photographic establishments worked on a model of subdividing the labour and keeping workers, especially women, in menial roles. Pragnell was one of the photographers (along with Alice Hughes and Catherine Edmonds) recommended as an employer and a trainer in the women's press for women pursuing a photographic career. As a member of the Society of Lady Artists who sat on the selection committee for exhibitions, Pragnell was actively involved in women's artistic advancement.⁵³

What is most remarkable about Pragnell's International Congress speech is that she does not stop at criticising the commercial photographic industry, but she lays out an alternative mode of artistic production that is grounded in feminist, socialist politics. The next part of Pragnell's speech is worth quoting at length, as she lays out her vision for a 'centre for training women who wished to learn the workings of a high class and artistic business':

⁵¹ Ibid. Alice Hughes staffed her studio almost entirely with women and prioritised women for apprenticeships at this time. As we saw in chapter one, she also paid for her employees to be trained at the Regent Street Polytechnic. It is unlikely that Pragnell would have been unaware of Hughes's business, so perhaps it did not meet the standard that she desired for comprehensive photographic training in an all-women studio.

⁵² Pragnell, p. 202.

⁵³ 'Women's Doings', *Hearth and Home*, 17 February 1898, p. 601, 19th Century UK Periodicals. The Society of Lady Artists operated from 1869 to 1899. It began as the Society of Female Artists in 1855 and was renamed in 1869. In the twentieth century it became the Society of Women Artists, which is still operating today. The early records of the Society up until 1929 were destroyed in the Second World War, so it is not possible to learn more about Pragnell's involvement from this source.

I feel sure in time it would be possible to open studios in the provinces, the colonies, and America, each to be self-supporting, not employing outside labour, but each worker to be a part owner and sharing the proceeds. From the head studio would come the new ideas, the constant changes which are the vitality of a successful business, and which have been carefully thought out and tested. There could be one large, strong, trained body of women workers, whose lives would be made happier not only by doing successful and appreciated work, but by giving them individuality and independence of spirit. They would also raise the standard of photography throughout the country.⁵⁴

The model of studio photography that Pragnell envisages in this speech is aligned with a radical leftist politics that gave birth to the cooperative movement in the early nineteenth century.

In 1891 Beatrice Potter Webb had published her tract *The Cooperative Movement in Great Britain*. Her text documents the history of this 'new system of society' from its founding by Robert Owen, often cited as the father of British Socialism, who 'conceived the idea of a cooperative system of industry to replace the unrestrained competition of modern trade' in 1817.⁵⁵ The principles of Pragnell's alternative photographic studio laid out in her speech for the International Congress align closely with the co-operative movement's aims to 'substitute for private property a communal possession [...] and a communal accumulation of wealth'.⁵⁶ Under Pragnell's model of studio portraiture, workers would be 'part owners'. Although there is a 'head' studio, the imagined satellite studios are not hierarchical; the 'large, strong, trained body of women workers' share the profits and jointly own the business. Pragnell goes on in the speech to explain the centrality of cooperative strategies to this photographic enterprise: 'I am sure that co-operation being the basis of this pleasant

⁵⁴ Pragnell, pp. 202–3.

⁵⁵ Beatrice Potter Webb, *The Cooperative Movement in Great Britain* (London: Geo, Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1891). p. 12.

⁵⁶ Beatrice Potter Webb, p. 27.

and healthy work, a remunerative business and employment for all educated women would be the result; and a constant demand for this class of work is certain'.⁵⁷

The principles on which this envisaged business is built challenge the inherent inequalities of the capitalist enterprise, as critiqued by Karl Marx, which robbed workers of their individuality, health and happiness. In *Capital* (1867) Marx writes that, 'within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productiveness of labour are brought about at the cost of the individual labourer'. ⁵⁸ Pragnell's imagined studio, by contrast, explicitly restores the workers 'individuality and independence of spirit'. Within this vision for a photographic business, the women workers' wellbeing is prioritised. Raising the 'standard' of photography, in Pragnell's plan, comes second to the benefits of this labour to the workers: the artistic merit of their product occurs as a direct effect of the high standard of the working conditions.

Marx's *Capital* was undoubtedly the most influential critique of capitalist industry, but in Britain a discourse around the threat capitalism posed to artistic production and integrity and the imagining of alternative models, to which Pragnell was contributing, had been developing from the 1850s. John Ruskin combined art criticism and social criticism, railing against the evils of industrial capitalism with rhetoric that foreshadows that of Marx in *Capital*. Speaking of the business model of subdivided labour in his seminal essay 'The Nature of Gothic' in 1853 Ruskin wrote:

It is not, truly speaking, the labour that is divided; but the men; - divided into mere segments of men – broken into small fragments and crumbs of life. [...]

You must either make a tool of the creature, or a man of him. You cannot make both [...] it is verily this degradation of the operative into a machine, which, more than any other evil of the times, is leading the mass of the nations

⁵⁷ It is of course important to note the class politics at work here. Pragnell mentions at the start of the speech her opinion on 'educated' women working as photographers and indeed, her audience at the Congress would have been made up of educated, middle to upper-class women. In the statement quoted, the photographer refers to her belief in the power of 'co-operation' to bring about 'employment for all *educated* women' [my italics]. This demarcates a class of privileged women who would have access to education. A reference at the beginning of the speech to 'high-class artistic business', I understand to mean 'high-end', as in, of a high standard, rather than a reference to *upper* class, because this term is used within a discussion of corrupt and inferior photographic enterprises that Pragnell wants to dissociate from.

⁵⁸ Karl Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy (1867), ed. by Frederick Engels (New York: Cosimo, 2007), i, Part 2: The Process of Capitalist Production, p. 708.

everywhere into vain, incoherent, destructive struggling for freedom of which they cannot explain the nature to themselves.⁵⁹

Ruskin was vocal about the corrupting impacts of competition, instead advocating cooperative strategies and a return to the more 'organic' structures of medieval guilds. 60 It is for this reason that Ruskin became the greatest influence on the artist, writer and socialist William Morris, whose daughter, May, shared the stage with Pragnell at the International Congress in 1899. 61 The values on which Pragnell's vision for studio portraiture are based, connect with those of the contemporaneous Arts and Crafts movement, which had grown out of William Morris's socialist politics. Arts and Crafts positioned itself against the mechanised manufacture and the alienation of the worker endemic to industrial capitalism, seeking instead to restore a structure akin to medieval guilds of small workshops and retain the integrity of each individual, skilled craftsperson.⁶² Morris's belief was that through egalitarian, traditional methods the standard of the object being produced would be raised. In 1861 Morris had established the decorating and retailing company Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co (Morris & Co. from 1875), a business that existed as the practical embodiment of his politics. From 1885 May Morris took over the embroidery department of the business and after her father's death in 1896 upheld his political and artistic legacy in her own work and activism.63 In 1907, May Morris founded the Women's Guild of Arts (WGA) to create a space for social and professional networking for women working across artistic disciplines and push back against the Art Workers' Guild's exclusion of female members. The WGA's founding principles were to 'keep to the highest level the arts by which and for which we live', to keep 'ever fresh and vital the enthusiasm' and

⁵⁹ John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* (London: Smith Elder and Co., 1853), II, pp. 165, 196–98.

⁶⁰ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780 – 1950* (London: Penguin, 1971), pp. 145–46. Williams points out that while Ruskin's praise for cooperative methods seem to align with socialism, his authoritarian ideas and insistence on a rigid class system estrange him from socialism.

⁶¹ Raymond Williams, p. 153.

⁶² Alan Crawford, *Arts and Crafts Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2003) http://www.oxfordartonline.com/groveart/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7000004452 [accessed 20 April 2019].

⁶³ Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Morris, May* (Oxford University Press, 2007) http://www.oxfordartonline.com/groveart/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7002060712 [accessed 30 April 2019].

generally to buoy each other up with 'camaraderie' in the face of a sexist and exploitative artistic milieus and markets.⁶⁴

At the International Congress both Pragnell and Morris expressed their scorn towards commercialism and the machinations of capitalism, or, as Morris put it, echoing Ruskin, society's 'infatuated admiration for, and subjugation by, machinery'. ⁶⁵ In her speech, Morris spoke of the public's lack of appreciation for skilled, careful artistry and preference for cheapness over quality, a sentiment echoed in Pragnell's reference to the 'inartistic' and 'artificial' products of the 'commercial photographic business'. Pragnell indicated her disapproval of outsourcing labour and favour of keeping business contained and 'self-supporting', principles that Morris & Co. had been founded on and that May Morris upheld. In more specific, gendered issues affecting the woman worker, there are strong connections between Morris and Pragnell's statements. Morris lamented the 'want of thorough training that hampers women in the arts, great and small,' a fact that, as we have seen, Pragnell mentioned in her own speech, and employed as a prompt to share her vision for a centre for training women.

While in 1899 Morris had not yet set up the WGA, there are clear resonances between Pragnell's vision for a guild-like 'large, strong, trained body of women workers' and the Women's Guild that Morris established eight years later in terms of their progressive, feminist agendas to improve the position of women working in the artistic industries. Pragnell died in 1905 without having set up her alternative studio system, but the alignment of Pragnell and Morris's mission in their respective fields make it possible to speculate on whether Pragnell had an influence on Morris's setting up of the WGA, and indeed Mary Lowndes's setting up of the Artists' Suffrage League in 1907. Morris and Lowndes would both have heard Pragnell speak so passionately of her ideas for an alternative model for practicing studio photography at the 1899 Congress. Surely these women would not have been in such close proximity, with such allied politics and not had discussions about how to improve the position of women

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⁶⁴ May Morris, Draft Address to the WGA, WMS collection, cited in Anna Mason and others, *May Morris: Arts and Crafts Designer* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2017), p. 24.

⁶⁵ May Morris, 'Decorative Needlework', in *The International Congress of Women, London, July 1899, Women in Professions*, ed. by The Countess of Aberdeen (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1900), pp. 191–94 (p. 192).

working in the arts – the International Council was, after all, a forum set up with the express purpose of facilitating such discourse and change.

It is also possible that Pragnell knew Morris before appearing at the International Congress alongside her, which would also explain the affinities between their speeches. Pragnell certainly moved in radical, artistic London circles. This is evident from an extraordinary watercolour with ink and graphite portrait of Pragnell [Fig. 15] made by the artist and occultist Pamela Colman Smith held at the National Trust's Smallhythe Place property, previously the home of Ellen Terry. Smith's signature sinuous line represents Pragnell's idiosyncratic face in profile, looking off to the left of the frame, seemingly in the midst of photographing a sitter. Pragnell is depicted in a bold green skirt and orange blouse with a pussy bow, her hair pulled back and coiled at the back of her head, focusing intently on her subject. She is steadying the large format plate camera on its tripod with one hand and reaching back to adjust it with the other. Pragnell is represented as a formidable, dynamic figure with a heavy brow and slightly crooked nose, an intense gaze and mouth fixed in determination. Curiously, Smith has created a visual echo in the portrait between the curve of Pragnell's hips and drape of her skirt and the legs of the tripod, which arch out and down with feet that spread across the floor. This repetition of form creates a link between the body of the photographer and her technical apparatus.



Figure 15: Kate Pragnell by Pamela Colman Smith, 1900, Watercolour with ink and graphite drawing, 240 x 290mm, Smallhythe Place, National Trust.

Pragnell had previously photographed Colman Smith and the inscription 'She Katie did 'em' seems to refer to a private joke between them – a pun on the katydid insect – indicating the closeness of their friendship. ⁶⁶ In the portrait, behind Pragnell, as if fixed on the wall, are portraits of Ellen Terry, perhaps even Pragnell's own portraits of Terry. I have not found any existing photographs of Terry by Pragnell, but Pragnell did photograph Terry's daughter, the openly lesbian costumier, Edith Craig, who was a part of the Lyceum Theatre Company with which Colman Smith was involved. Colman

⁶⁶ Pragnell's portrait of Smith was published in *The Lamp* (New York: Scribners, 1903), p. 418. It is not credited to Pragnell but the original backdrop from her studio is recognisable as the picturesque scene with foliage and two short stone columns that flank the sitter.

Smith's portrait of Pragnell is included in a 'book of illustrations and stories based on a trip to America that Ellen Terry, Edith Craig, Henry Irving, Laurence Irving, Bram Stoker and Colman Smith took from 1899-1900' according to the National Trust catalogue, so it is likely that Pragnell was closely affiliated with this group.

The fact that Kate Pragnell was part of this non-conformist artistic milieu adds further insight into the progressive, feminist character of her politics that were demonstrated by her speech at the 1899 International Congress of Women. To return to Pragnell's speech, the penultimate paragraph reiterates the photographer's belief in the transformative potential of co-operative working methods through reference to her own experience of working closely with Stewart:

I do not see how, on my lines of keeping the portrait, one person single-handedly can continuously manage sitters individually, and the camera as well. It means being in two places at the same minute. I, therefore, have trained Miss Stewart to work with me, and I am confident that I owe a great deal of the artistic success in my pictures to the fact that I can concentrate my thoughts entirely on the posing and lighting of the sitter while my colleague adjusts the camera and exposes the plate. It is so much less tiring to the sitter, and the quicker the method of work the more likely is the picture to be a success. Here again, co-operation is of the greatest value. There is a mental as well as a physical effort in taking artistic photographs, so it is much wiser to have others to share the labour. I should be very sorry for others to have to face, and single-handed as I was, go through the same troubles and painful experiences in starting this business, owing to ignorance of commercial life, all of which might have been avoided and money saved, had I been trained by some one who understood all these things.⁶⁷

This extract of the speech is remarkable for the attention to different types of labour involved in the practice of studio portraiture and the benefits of sharing it. Of particular note is the explicit differentiation Pragnell makes between 'mental' and

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⁶⁷ Pragnell, p. 204.

'physical' labour, a topic that was explored chapter two in relation to Lallie Charles's practice of studio portraiture. Here, Pragnell uses exactly the same term, and makes very similar observations to Charles about putting the sitter at ease. As we saw, Charles's strategy was to establish a familiar, even intimate, bond with her sitter over tea and subtly assess their features and personality ahead of the sitting, giving herself time to prepare her approach and put them at ease. Pragnell's primary strategy, we learn from this speech, was collaboration, or, 'co-operation', as she terms it. The photographer asserts the perceived impossibility ('being in two places at the same minute') of working alone and attributes 'artistic success' to the effective delegation of roles within the photographic process. As Jill Ehnenn suggests, collaboration complicates mainstream notions of authorship, and in the case of Pragnell and Stewart their shared dynamic makes it impossible to identify a sole author as both partners were equally integral to the operation.⁶⁸

After Kate Pragnell's death in 1905, Alice Stewart took over the business for the next ten years and continued to operate as a professional photographer using the name 'Kate Pragnell'. ⁶⁹ We can speculate as to the motivations for Stewart's ownership and continued use of this professional name. From a commercial perspective it would of course have been prudent to keep the business's name consistent, in the interests of preserving a reputation formed over many years. It also suggests the level of professional ownership that Stewart felt over the name, having worked under it for so many years while Pragnell was living. Given the intimacy and affinity that existed between these two women and their commitment to mutual artistic practice, we might also understand Stewart's decision to labour under the name of her deceased partner as a gesture laden with meaning and sentiment, a way of honouring Pragnell's life. A life, of course, that Stewart had shared.

Following Pragnell's death, Stewart ensured that the photographic studio and its innovations were placed at the forefront of the burgeoning mass culture of

⁶⁸ Ehnenn, p. 9.

⁶⁹ The studio remained at 39 Brompton Square until 1911 (Post Office London Directory for 1911 (London: Kelly's Directories), p. 211) when it moved to 16 Albemarle Street, Westminster and operated until 1915. (Post Office London Directory for 1915 (London: Kelly's Directories), p. 159.)

spectacle and commercial leisure activities that defined the Edwardian era and the subsequent arrival of modernity. She continued to promote and exhibit the Chiaroni process, showing photographs made using the process at the Ideal Home Exhibition in 1910 in the 'arts and crafts' section. To Stewart also sought out new audiences and horizons for her work across the Atlantic, advertising her services as an 'artistic photographer' specialising in the 'Chiaroni process' in the American lifestyle magazine *Town and Country* [Fig. 16]. But she did not stop at expanding her practice of studio portraiture. Ever-enterprising, Stewart branched out into the relatively new (and already male-dominated) field of press photography and secured a prestigious role as the official photographer for the Chelsea Historical Pageant in 1908. At this time, the obsession with historical pageants – known as 'pageantitis' – was sweeping Edwardian England. The Chelsea Historical Pageant of June 1908 was a grand civic event a year in the planning to celebrate the locality's role in the major historical events of the preceding millennia, with 1200 participants from the community re-enacting scenes from history.

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⁷⁰ Daily Mail, 23 April 1910, p. 3. The 'Kate Pragnell' Studio (at this time run by Alice Stewart) exhibited alongside Lena Connell at this exhibition, whose suffrage portraits are discussed at length in chapter four.

⁷¹ Town & Country, 19 April 1913, 84.; Town & Country, 10 May 1913, p. 70.; Town & Country, 7 June 1913, p. 72.

https://historicalpageants.ac.uk/featured-pageants/chelsea-historical-pageant-1908/
Uncatalogued photographic holdings of the 1908 Pageant are held at the Kensington and Chelsea Local Studies Library. Thanks are due to Dave Walker (Local Studies Manager at Kensington Central Library) for showing me the pageant scrapbooks and for his insights into Kate Pragnell's practice also shared on his blog: https://rbkclocalstudies.wordpress.com/2012/06/21/kate-at-the-pageant-1908/

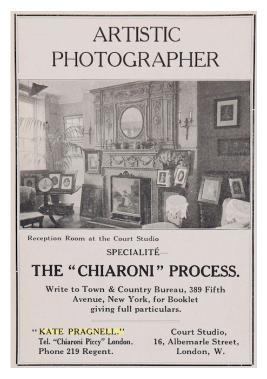


Figure 16: Advertisement for Kate Pragnell Studio published in Town & Country Magazine, 1913.



Figure 17: Kate Pragnell advertisement from the Chelsea Historical Pageant Programme, 1908.

The studio advertisement from the Pageant programme features the name 'Kate Pragnell' in an elaborate scroll [Fig. 17] and a Pre-Raphaelite-esque woman with flowers in her flowing hair and a patterned dress looking through a folio of portraits. The organic forms and medievalist, romanticised aesthetic of the illustration and heading speaks to the visual language of the arts and crafts movement, signalling Pragnell and Stewart's alignment with its political and aesthetic values. The commitment of both women to egalitarian principles, to enabling others to thrive and make progress through collective endeavour is further illustrated by Stewart's engagement in community work. She served as the vice president of the South Kensington district of the League of Mercy, an organisation set up by the Prince of Wales in 1899 to recruit volunteers to provide aid to patients at charity hospitals. Stewart hosted fundraising events at the 'Kate Pragnell Court Studio' and invited her and Pragnell's old friend Pamela Colman Smith to provide the entertainment with performances of Jamaican Folk tales. 73 The Court Studio was, therefore, more than just a commercial enterprise. It was a space of artistic innovation and experimentation, a place where alternatives to the status quo were conceptualised, and even a home to community organising and fundraising for a cause that acted as a precursor to the welfare state. In the next chapter we will see this theme continued, as women photographers' studios became politicised spaces within the suffrage campaign.

Kate Pragnell and Alice Stewart's commitment to mutuality, shared creative endeavour and a co-operative vision of studio portraiture pushed back against a hegemonic artistic culture that valued masculinist individuality and the cult of personality. In an industry that did not value women's labour let alone creative contribution, Pragnell – drawing on the success, and self-confessed joy of her own partnership with Stewart – proposed a co-operative, supportive model of education and employment for women to become successful photographers and reap the rewards of artistic – and *unalienated* – labour. Although this plan was not realised, in the spirit of sisterhood Pragnell and Stewart exclusively employed women in their own studio, a decision Pragnell framed to the International Congress of Women as her 'contribution', to an implied feminist politics. We might think of this policy as a step

⁷³ *Morning Post*, 14 April 1908, p. 6.

towards establishing the 'large, strong, trained body of women workers' that Pragnell's speech envisioned. Pragnell and Stewart sought to empower women through photography, a vocation that, in Pragnell's words promised to grant 'happiness, individuality and independence of spirit', and they strongly believed that the photographic industry, and the art form, would benefit as a result of their contributions. As Pragnell stated, 'I hope each woman worker will keep uppermost in her mind the desire to raise the standard of work'. ⁷⁴ Innovation was fundamental to Pragnell and Stewart's practice of studio portraiture in terms of the work they produced, through their development of the 'Chiaroni' technique for example, but this spirit of progress extended far beyond the artistic or commercial realm – it was ideological, too. ⁷⁵

Coda

The primary sources that I have used to develop the argument in this chapter are rich in detail and they communicate Stewart and Pragnell's values, experiences and ideas very directly, especially in the case of the International Congress of Women speech, which records Pragnell's own words. These are precious resources because they are so rare. In this chapter I chose to focus on one studio and its relational dynamics but there are many examples of Victorian and Edwardian photographic partnerships between women that may have been quietly resisting the status quo, or even drawing directly on Pragnell's vision for a feminist practice of studio portraiture. Her speech was intended to inspire and influence, after all. In this coda I collate some of my broader, more nascent research findings on this topic to illustrate the scope of possibility for future researchers. I also present it in the interests of transparency about the challenges of researching historical relationships – whether personal or professional, or both. With Pragnell and Stewart, the trail of breadcrumbs yielded enough evidence for me to make arguments with integrity. These substantial findings

⁷⁴ Pragnell, p. 202.

⁷⁵ Alice Stewart lived until she was eighty-one. By 1911 she was living at The Old Manor in Merstham, Surrey with Ethel Lloyd, a journalist, and she died there in 1941. *England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1995* [database on-line]; *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1911.* Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives of the UK (TNA), 1911, Class: RG14; Piece: 3204; Schedule Number: 224.

enabled me to identify the queerness of their partnership, and to contextualise the proposal for an all-female network of portrait studios and training centres within a radical politics. However, the archival research I conducted into several female partnerships mentioned below did not return as much information, in some cases only an address and the dates they were active. Some studios closed after just one year of trading – an indication of just how hard it was for women to thrive in the commercial photographic industry. Despite the limitations, through a consideration of female photographic partnerships in operation between 1888 – 1914, and the conditions under which they set up their businesses, I was able to identify the commonality of women opting for shared artistic endeavour and joint ventures into the world of commercial photography.

Working alone, or indeed, occupying the public sphere alone, was not a safe activity for women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Beyond the material risk of being assaulted, there was also the social risk of being accused of impropriety if spending time alone with a member of the opposite sex.⁷⁶ There was also the practical issue of the amount of labour that the process required, as Pragnell elucidated. Sisterhood was a theme that emerged often in my research as women from the same family decided to expand their horizons together. As discussed in the introduction to the thesis, this phenomenon was represented in Amy Levy's *The Romance of a Shop* (1888), a New Woman novel that follows the Lorimer sisters from the provinces to London to set up a photography studio and charts the various impediments that they encounter. In the mid 1890s the feminist journal *The Woman's Signal* encouraged sisters to set up a photographic business together as a potential solution to these problems:

In a family where there are several daughters it would be an excellent thing for two, or even three, to go through the necessary training, and to open a studio at the seaside. One sister might take the photographs, another could do the retouching, while the third might undertake the printing. This would be a fair

⁷⁶ Dorothy Wilding details in her autobiography an incident from the beginning of her career (circa 1913) where she was alone and had to fight off a male customer who attempted to sexually assault her in her studio. Wilding, p. 36.

division of labour and a very pleasant one, and would, in the course of time, prove a remunerative way of earning a living. ⁷⁷

Trade directories dating from the 1880s to the 1910s list many photographic studios under the plural title 'misses' with a joint surname, indicating that it was common for unmarried sisters to open studios together. Indeed, Lallie Charles set up her studio in 1896 with her two younger sisters Rita and Isabella Martin; Rita worked with her elder sister for ten years before branching out on her own. The photographer Olive Edis, famous for her photographs of women workers in the First World War, also began her career in partnership with her sister Katharine Legat, setting up a portrait studio together in 1905 in Sheringham, Norfolk. Legat, whom Edis referred to lovingly as 'my sister-partner' left the partnership in 1907 to get married but it was from this initial foundation of partnership that Edis's career blossomed. A broader ethos of sisterhood is explored in the next chapter, where we will consider how women's practice of studio portraiture served the sisterhood of suffrage campaigners.

Many other notable women photographers mentioned in the press of the late-Victorian and Edwardian period were working in partnerships. An article by Fred Miller titled 'The Artistic Work of Some Lady Photographers' published in *The Lady's Realm* in 1901 showcases the work of leading female photographers at the time and includes several partnerships. Miller mentions 'Miss Flora Fraser and Miss Agnes Jennings' who ran a studio at 9 Regent Street, London between 1899 – 1900, noting that they were 'both art students before they turned their attention to the calling they now so successfully follow'.⁷⁹ He also discusses the 'Misses Le Mesurier and Marshall' who ran a studio at Red Brick, Campden Hill Road between 1897 – 1904 and then at 9

⁷⁷ Anning.

⁷⁸ The Misses Bertolacci, for example, were three sisters (Caroline, Marie, Ida) who ran a studio at 25 Redcliffe Road, Brompton, Kensington from 1883 – 1889. Other examples: the Misses Lizzie and Kate Gray, 100 Westbourne Grove W, 1895 or Misses Phoebe and Olivia Jenner, 411 Mare Street, Hackney, NE, 1904. (Trade directories 1880 - 1910, National Portrait Gallery Archives).

⁷⁹ Miller, 'The Artistic Work of Some Lady Photographers', p. 560. Fraser and Jennings were recommended by *Hearth and Home* in 1899 as a studio that was very hospitable to women wanting to learn photography. 'Miss Jennings' charge is from £40 to £60 for a year, according to arrangement. She does not take her pupils on afterwards, but feels sure their training would put them in a position to obtain a post in one of the large photographic shops, either as retouchers (salaries varying from 12s 6d at the very beginning up to £1, 30s., and even occasionally £3 a week), as "receptionists" in the showroom, or in one of the many other departments – e.g., spotting, enlarging or working up prints.' Pandora, 'Our Employment Bureau'.

Kensington High Street from 1905 – 1908. As mentioned in chapter two, both were students under Professor Herkomer at the Bushey Art School. Elsewhere in the article, Miller writes that '[a] technical training is a matter of necessity, and several ladies whose work is here given have found much assistance from the classes held at the Polytechnic'.⁸⁰ The fact that institutional training is mentioned several times in an article that features a number of female photographic partnerships is significant. As opportunities for technical training in photography opened up to women, the collective learning environment would have facilitated meetings between women who were interested in running a studio to form an alliance and go into business together, or for women who planned to go into partnership to enrol on a course and train together.

Existing departmental records from the Regent Street Polytechnic are incomplete, however, the documents that survive show that, as Miller notes, a number of women photographers who went on to run successful studios studied at the Polytechnic. Alice Garstin and Dora Antrobus, who ran a studio at 26 New Cavendish Street, London between 1904 – 1905, trained together at the Polytechnic School. The 'mesdames' became very well-known and exhibited their work at the Royal Photographic Society exhibitions in 1903 and 1904 in the 'General Professional Photography' section. In 1904, H. Snowden Ward, co-editor of the *Photogram* and husband of Catherine Weed Ward, described them as 'pioneers of a new movement'. Alarstin and Antrobus's unique selling point was the homeliness of their studio and ground-floor level; they had taken advice from Howard Farmer, their tutor at the Polytechnic, on how to fit out their studio and adapt the artificial lighting. Their aim was to 'reach a number of people who do not patronize the ordinary studios, especially elderly ladies, invalids and children' – a clever commercial decision that ties

⁸⁰ Miller, 'The Artistic Work of Some Lady Photographers', p. 558.

 $^{^{81}}$ For example, the Polytechnic photography department reports from the year 1908-9 tell us that the Misses MacFarlane 'open[ed] in business direct from the school'. These photographers are mentioned again in the records from 1910-11. Under 'notes on some of the students' it is recorded that they trained at the school 'exclusively' and opened a studio in London. Polytechnic Education Department: Departmental reports 1906-1911, RSP/2/5/2, University of Westminster Archives.

⁸² Rosenblum, p. 89.

⁸³ Exhibitions of the Royal Photographic Society 1870-1915. Catalogue records from the annual exhibition http://erps.dmu.ac.uk [accessed 6 February 2019]. In 1903 Garstin and Antrobus exhibited alongside Lena Connell.

⁸⁴ H. Snowden Ward, 'The Portrait and the Studio', Wilson's Photographic Magazine, 1904, p. 553.

into the argument made in chapter two about the commercialising of a domestic skillset in order to create a niche in the market.⁸⁵ Snowden Ward's article gives a great insight into the high standard of the training at the Polytechnic and how Garstin and Antrobus worked together. The photographers directed the portraits according to their shared vision – with one of them 'superintend[ing] the pose' and arranging the background whilst the other set up the lighting 'first for focussing, then for exposure' but the actual operation of the camera was done by a male assistant.86 The traditional gendered dynamic of male creative sovereignty and female labour as peripheral, or supportive is reversed in this example, wherein the women exerted artistic agency and a man was employed on a more subservient, technical level. Garstin and Antrobus trained at the Polytechnic school because they wanted to work professionally, but it is not clear from Snowden Ward's article if they met at the School, realised their shared ambitions and decided to work together, or if they knew each other previously and enrolled together with the view to form a partnership. Either way it is interesting to think that these women's photographic collaborations began before they signed the lease on their studio, working together and honing their skills, approach and style in the Polytechnic classes.

The examples discussed above show how photography enabled women to find independence and to work in new ways, collectively, with peers, friends or 'sister-partners'. While the work that these photographers produced was not valued enough to preserve or subsequently excavate by the institutions and ideologies that determine (art) histories, this chapter has shown the social and political importance of women's commercial partnerships. The instances of women working collaboratively in the photographic industry that I have mapped here were taking place against a turbulent political backdrop of collective feminist struggle for enfranchisement. Women were rallying together in this historical moment around the suffrage campaign, realising that collectively they had more power. Indeed, Pragnell's vision of a 'large, strong, trained body of women workers' in 1899 was realised as a public spectacle ten years later when female photographers came together to march in the streets at The Pageant of Women's Trades and Professions, organised by the Suffrage Atelier and the London

85 Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Suffrage Society. A year later, Alice Stewart, exhibiting as the 'Kate Pragnell Studio' showed her 'Chiaroni' prints at the at the London Ideal Home Exhibition alongside Lena Connell, one of the most politically active commercial women photographers in the campaign for suffrage. Connell is a major focus of the next chapter, in which I examine the way that women's practice of studio portraiture and feminist activism intersect within the context of the suffrage campaign, and where the emancipatory potential of a career in photography was writ large.

Chapter 4

Picturing the Modern Woman: Studio portraiture and the British suffrage campaign, 1906 – 1914

The previous chapter explored how Kate Pragnell and Alice Stewart embodied and imagined alternatives to the status quo through their collaborative photographic practice. Although these photographers did not explicitly align themselves with an organised political movement, their politics and ideals were grounded in women working together, supporting one another and making advances collectively. These principles were of course foundational to the nineteenth and early-twentieth century feminist movement, which focused on the issue of women's legal status and in particular female suffrage. This chapter addresses how commercial women photographers engaged in organised feminist politics in the period 1906 – 1914. Political activism can take many different forms, yet the more sensationalist narratives of the suffrage campaign have dictated our common historical understanding of this period, populating our imaginations with women smashing windows, blowing up letterboxes, slashing paintings and enduring the horrors of force feeding. These were all important, but extreme, acts of resistance; in this chapter, I look at the women photographers who made much quieter, but no less important, contributions, and who have been left out of the dominant histories of this period in British history. I argue that by lending their skills in portraiture to the 'cause', to picture a modern, politically engaged mode of womanhood, women photographers expanded the parameters of feminist activism and shaped its visual culture.

British women's fight for the vote spans over sixty years and there is not space here to go over this complex history in detail. The time period that this chapter covers begins in 1906 when the flagging Victorian suffrage campaign was reignited by the militant campaign of the Pankhursts' Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) and ends at the outbreak of the First World War, which, if it didn't put an end to suffrage campaigning, reoriented the energies of unions into either the pacifist movement or

the war effort.¹ This critical period of the suffrage movement in Britain involved many different factions, both constitutional (law-abiding 'suffragists') and militant ('suffragettes').² Many activists were members of multiple suffrage leagues simultaneously, and splinter groups emerged out of the major parties, such as the division in the WSPU in 1907, which resulted in the foundation of the Women's Freedom League (WFL). Therefore, it is perhaps more accurate to think of suffrage campaigns rather than a singular, united campaign. For the purposes of simplicity, I will refer to the 'suffrage campaign' as an umbrella term that denotes a moment of heightened activity when women from across the political spectrum organised around a shared feminist objective.

As I have indicated above, it is important to note that the suffrage campaign was a vehicle for a much larger feminist project, one that has been theorised as 'first wave' feminism.³ The revolutionary aims of this movement were encapsulated by the suffragette Cicely Hamilton, who wrote that the 'agitation for women's enfranchisement must inevitably shake the "normal woman" [...] with her "destiny" of marriage and motherhood and housekeeping, and no interest outside her home – and especially no interest in the man's preserve of politics!'⁴ Similarly, Christabel Pankhurst stated that the WSPU's 'main concern was not with the numbers of women to be enfranchised but with the removal of a stigma upon womanhood as such'.⁵ This was more than a campaign to pressurise the government to enfranchise women, it was also a rebellion against the 'slave spirit', as Christabel Pankhurst termed it, that was engrained in normative Victorian and Edwardian constructs of womanhood.⁶ Women in growing numbers were rejecting 'angel-of-the-house' Victorian femininity and

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¹ At the outbreak of war, Emmeline Pankhurst suspended all militancy and the WSPU's suffrage activity stopped. Harold L. Smith, *The British Women's Suffrage Campaign 1866 – 1928*, 2nd edn (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2007), p. 78. National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) campaigned for peace (Smith, p. 74), as did Sylvia Pankhursts' East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELFS) (Smith, p. 80).

² Suffragette' was a pejorative coined by the *Daily Mail* that the militant WSPU re-claimed (*Daily Mail*, 10 January 1906, p. 3.). Diane Atkinson, *Rise up, Women! The Remarkable Lives of the Suffragettes* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), p. 39.

³ Maria DiCenzo, Lucy Delap, and Leila Ryan, *Feminist Media History: Suffrage, Periodicals and the Public Sphere* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 13-14.

⁴ Cicely Hamilton, *Life Errant* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1935), p. 65.

⁵ Christabel Pankhurst, *Unshackled: The Story of How We Won the Vote* (London: Hutchinson, 1959), p. 189. cited in Harold L. Smith, p. 40.

⁶ Harold L. Smith, p. 40.

standing up to the patriarchal systems of oppression, willing to fight for power in a society that had for so long infantilised them and treated them as men's property.

Hamilton's reference to the 'normal woman' is particularly pertinent to my discussion of studio portraiture because it is likely that this form of visual culture has been disregarded by scholars due to its perceived service to, compliance with, and reproduction of, normativity, as I discuss in the introduction to the thesis. The portraits examined so far have reiterated the tropes and conventions that reified the dominant and traditional feminine ideal of the day; the women represented were stately princesses, glamorous Society hostesses, enchanting debutantes, devoted wives and mothers. Yet, as this chapter in particular shows, studio portraiture was a multifaceted practice. Here I examine the construction of a dissenting mode of femininity that developed in this period: an empowered woman who sought independence, education and vocation beyond marriage and motherhood. The modern woman needed visual representation, and it was commercial photographers specialising in portraiture – specifically women photographers who stood to gain the most from the modern woman's victory over patriarchal disenfranchisement – who had the skills and experience to shape her public image. This chapter charts the co-opting of women photographers' skills that had been developed in the commercial sphere, where their business typically centred around the affirmation of normative gender roles and the status quo, into the arena of protest.

In part one of this chapter, I unpack how women's professional photographic work became politicised. The suffrage press is central to this discussion: I explore how it promoted women photographers' professional achievements and, connecting to the discussion in chapter one about the role of the women's press in enabling women to enter the profession, I examine how suffrage publications were used by women photographers of all levels of experience to seek or advertise opportunities and thus advance their careers. Within this culture of women's investment in women, politics and commerce become difficult to separate. I show how commercial photographers contributed to what I term the 'feminist solidarity economy' of the suffrage movement by offering discounted or cost-price sittings to their comrades. These were the conditions out of which women photographers began producing propaganda for the campaign in the form of portraits of its leading figures.

Section two examines the production of portraits of suffrage activists in detail, analysing their visual coding and how they fashion the 'modern woman'. As mainstream media sought to represent suffrage activists as unhinged social deviants, the campaign response was to counteract this negative image with a positive one, restoring the humanity of notable campaigners in sympathetic studio portraits. At the time Britain was in the midst of a 'craze' for sending and collecting portrait postcards, a phenomenon that suffrage campaigners exploited to publicise their work.

Reproducing portraits of leading figures on postcards was a shrewd move that ensured the mass dissemination of this positive representation and exposure for the cause.

Studio portraiture became an emancipatory practice within this context, as women photographers volunteered their services to produce propaganda and reoriented their commercial and technical skillset to the fundraising efforts of the campaign with a 'pop-up' portrait studio.

Lena Connell's political portraits and activities, coupled with her representation in archives and national collections, make her a dominant figure in this chapter. However, Connell was far from being the only female photographer engaged in the campaign for suffrage who helped to shape its visual culture: Alice Barker, Annie Bell, Lizzie Caswall Smith, Muriel Darton, Marie Leon, Gertrude Lowy, Constance Marsden and Ada Schofield were just some of the women studio photographers who worked in the service of the campaign, yet their contributions are missing from the literature on the suffrage movement. Some of these women are discussed within this chapter, but each of them warrants a study in her own right. My hope is that the research I present here will stimulate new enquiries into the lives and work of these photographers.

With this investigation, I build on scholarship of the suffrage movement's visual culture begun in the mid 1980s. Val Williams acknowledged the importance of studio

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⁷ There have been no substantial critical appraisals of the contributions of these photographers to the suffrage campaign. I have found only one text focused solely on Lena Connell's career: Shirley Neale, 'Mrs Beatrice Cundy, Née Adeline Beatrice Connell, 1875 – 1949', *History of Photography*, 25:1 (2002), 61-7. Neale's research is biographically-focused and while it provides an overview of Connell's political engagement, it does not present any extensive analysis of Connell's suffrage aesthetics. The article reveals an important discovery that in 1922 Connell changed her name to 'Beatrice Cundy' and had a second, equally successful, career as an 'at-home' photographer under this name. Connell stated this decision was due to 'family reasons' and Neale proposes that her decision to change her name speaks of a desire to break with her activist past following her marriage. Connell had married Jack Arthur Cundy in 1914; as Neale acknowledges, the reason why Connell waited eight years to adopt her middle name and her married surname for her professional identity remains a mystery.

portraiture within the British suffrage movement in The Other Observers (1986), noting that 'for the first time, women controlled and directed their own image in the cause of politics'.8 However, Williams' discussion of suffrage photography is focused primarily on the documentary work of Norah Smyth and Christina Broom. 9 A year later, Lisa Tickner's study The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907 – 1914 (1987) broke new ground, presenting a history of the suffrage movement though its imagery and aesthetics. In this landmark text, Tickner considered the politics of production, spectacle and representation within the suffrage campaign, through analysis of banners, posters, postcards and documentary photographs – materials that confounded the art/propaganda divide. My study aligns with Tickner's approach, in that it 'sketches the infrastructure of suffrage propaganda – it's organisation, production and circulation', only with a specific focus on women's studio portraits of activists.10

Recently Tickner's agenda has been revived by two key texts. Colleen Denney's book The Visual Culture of Women's Activism in London, Paris and Beyond (2018) considers suffragists' strategic modelling of themselves on 'iconic allegorical representations' and their 'homage to great women' across a diverse range of representational modes. 11 Suffrage and the Arts (2019), edited by Miranda Garrett and Zoë Thomas, brings together a diversity of recent research on the visual culture of the campaign, including an essay by Rosie Broadley on portraiture and militancy. Broadley's discussion focuses on paintings, in particular the work of artist Ethel Wright,

⁸ Val Williams, pp. 24, 93.

⁹ Within her discussion of Madame Yevonde, Williams gives a couple of paragraphs to studio portraiture and the suffrage campaign with reference to Lena Connell's portrait of Edith Craig and Cicely Hamilton [Fig. 34]. While Williams' commentary is very brief, she makes an the important point that, 'such directed picturing in the service of a feminist cause was an important development within women's photography, and indicated just how effectively studio portraiture could be used in this context' Val Williams, p. 93. I agree with Williams's claim, and this chapter unpacks the broader significance of this development.

¹⁰ Tickner, p. ix.

¹¹Colleen Denney, The Visual Culture of Women's Activism in London, Paris and Beyond: An Analytical Art History, 1860 to the Present (North Carolina: Macfarland, 2018), p. 9. Like Tickner, Denney's focus is on printed materials such as posters and documentary photography of suffragettes. Studio portraits of suffrage activists are not a subject of Denney's enquiry, although she quotes Williams to credit Lena Connell's role in combatting the negative representation of suffrage activists through studio portraiture (Denney, p. 92).

and how suffragettes sought to repair their public image through portraiture. While Broadley is concerned with the roles that fine art, institutional collecting practices and exhibition culture played within the suffrage publicity campaign, I focus on the ways that women's photographic production was politicised and on studio portraits, which, by virtue of their medium, were easier to reproduce and disseminate widely and cheaply. The new research I present here contributes to and expands the critical field discussed above by scrutinising the particularities of commercial women photographers' 'service to a feminist cause', to paraphrase Williams, demonstrating the emancipatory potential of photography when practiced by women at this historical juncture.

The politicisation of women's photographic work

In *The Spectacle of Women* Lisa Tickner explains how the figure of the working woman was weaponised in the campaign for suffrage. She writes that 'working women [...] were an important group through which to invoke women's resourcefulness, competence and capacity for social and economic independence'.¹³ Tickner cites a speech given by Eva Gore Booth in 1906 in which the activist exposed the injustice of women's role in producing the country's wealth despite the 'gross disability and industrial disadvantage of an absolute want of political power' that they experienced.¹⁴ As things stood in the early twentieth century, women who ran businesses, such as photographic studios, were paying business taxes and operating under trading laws in which they had no say. Women who worked in the photographic industry could also be paid less than men for the same work.¹⁵ The 'crime', as suffragists put it, of taxation without political representation was an enduring

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¹² Rosie Broadley, 'Painting Suffragettes: Portraits and the Militant Movement', in *Suffrage and the Arts: Visual Culture, Politics and Enterprise*, ed. by Miranda Garrett and Zoë Thomas (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), pp. 159-183.

¹³ Tickner, p. 174.

¹⁴ From the speech by Eva Gore Booth, 19 May 1906, cited in Tickner, p. 174.

¹⁵ The Equal Pay Act only came into effect in the United Kingdom in 1970: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1970/41/pdfs/ukpga 19700041 en.pdf

argument throughout the sixty year struggle for female suffrage.¹⁶ In an interview with the suffrage publication *The Vote* from 7 May 1910 Lena Connell stated that 'every woman who has to work for herself is an unconscious suffragist'.¹⁷ She explained to the interviewer that,

I first knew I was a Suffragist about four years ago [i.e. in 1906] when a girl Suffragist, Miss Gladice Keevil, who had just come out of prison after suffering a time in Holloway ... sat to me for her portrait [Fig. 18] [....] Equal pay for equal work in all professions open to men and women ought to be a first principle. Where it does not exist, there is an injustice to both sexes.¹⁸

Connell's statement provides insight into how women were galvanised to feminist politics – how it entered their workplaces, making them reflect on their societal position and the attendant injustices of women's second-class-citizen status. Connell was undoubtedly the most prolific of the photographers – male or female – that produced portraits of leading figures in both the militant and constitutional suffrage campaigns. She was a member of the Hampstead branch of the WSPU and hosted at least one drawing room meeting for the union in her studio, transforming the space where she made her living as a commercial photographer into a space of political organising. The fact that Connell's work as a photographer and her political activism

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¹⁶ See Hilary Frances, ""Pay the Piper, Call the Tune!": The Women's Tax Resistance League', in *The Women's Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives*, ed. by Maroula Joannou and June Purvis (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 65–76.

¹⁷ 'Miss Lena Connell', *The Vote*, 7 May 1910, pp. 16–17 (p. 16).

¹⁸ 'Miss Lena Connell', pp. 16–17.

¹⁹ It is important to note at the outset that several male-run studios also made portraits of suffrage leaders. Men who photographed suffragists were likely to have been sympathetic to the cause or even actively involved. As militancy escalated and suffragists came to be treated with growing hostility by the state and the public it is likely that men even risked their reputation to create these portraits. My research of suffrage photographers has revealed that when the Pankhursts and main WSPU organisers such as Annie Kenney were based in Manchester (1903 – 6) they used male-run firms for their portraits, for example Elliot and Fry. After the move to London in 1906 they tended towards female-run studios, most likely because there were more women photographers operating in London than in Manchester. For a complete list of photographers of suffrage figures see Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 546 – 549.

²⁰ Lena Connell hosted an 'At Home' at 50 Grove End Road on Saturday 6 July, 3.45pm. 'London Meetings for the Forthcoming Week', *Votes for Women*, 5 July 1912, p. 658.

were inextricably linked is further exemplified by the fact that she donated profits from her photographic business to support militant activity.²¹



Figure 18: Gladice Keevil by Lena Connell, postcard print, c. 1906, 142 mm x 90 mm, Women's Library at LSE, London.

A major strategy of the suffrage campaign was to make women's vast contribution to the national economy and labour force visible.²² This objective was carried out by the orchestration of large public spectacles that bought women out of their workplaces onto the street. The Pageant of Women's Trades and Professions was held on 27 April 1909 and was organised by the Suffrage Atelier and the London Suffrage Society. In this parade, a thousand women from ninety different occupations walked through

²¹ Votes for Women, 19 July 1912, p. 683. Although there is no evidence that Connell personally engaged in militancy, this action shows that she was a supporter of the militant campaign.

²² Tickner, p. 174.

London, demonstrating women's intellectual, artistic and industrial contributions to British society and appealing for enfranchisement that would give them a say in political decision making that impacted on their lives. Women photographers formed one of five divisions of working women in the Pageant, proudly representing their occupation by marching with black and silver shields, cameras and emblems of the sun. Connell joined this 'great procession' carrying a lantern and a banner. The pageant programme informed women about the benefits of enfranchisement specific to their area of work, recorded occupations where women excelled or dominated and reported on professions that were increasingly accommodating women. Photography was recommended to women as a 'wide field for artistic skill'. 25

Spectacle and mass public demonstrations like The Pageant of Women's Trades and Professions were crucial strategies of both the militant and constitutional suffrage campaigns. Another key strategy was publicity. Rather than attempting to convert or infiltrate the mainstream press, who were largely hostile to the 'cause', suffrage activists set up their own publicity machine. In February 1907 the WSPU established their Women's Press and in October of that year, the union published their own monthly newspaper, *Votes for Women,* which became a weekly in April 1908.²⁶ The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies followed suit, publishing their organ, *The Common Cause,* in 1909, and the Women's Freedom League, formed of WSPU dissenters, began publishing *The Vote,* also in 1909. Newsagents were anxious about the risk to their business of stocking publications deemed 'subversive', so other distribution methods had to be found.²⁷ As well as making sales in suffrage shops, members of suffrage societies sold the papers on the street and supporters could subscribe.²⁸ These publications served to educate and disseminate information and sought to maintain positive representation for the cause.²⁹ They also built a sense of

²³ Tickner, pp. 100–101.

²⁴ Tickner, p. 102.; 'Miss Lena Connell', p. 17.

²⁵ Tickner, p. 101.

²⁶ Atkinson, pp. 75–76.

²⁷ Elizabeth Crawford, p. 452.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Simone Murray, "'Deeds and Words": The Woman's Press and the Politics of Print', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 11.3 (2000), 197–222 (p. 202). The newspaper stated that it existed to educate the 'outside public' on what women were 'striving for' and 'how far the agitation is progressing.' Furthermore, it sought to 'supply to all those women who are at work within the ranks a bulletin of all the doings of the Union which shall keep them in touch with all the ramifications of the movement and enable them to

community and sisterly solidarity amongst society members.³⁰ *Votes for Women* nailed its feminist colours to the mast with a rousing dedication to 'the brave women who today are fighting for freedoms ... to all women all over the world, of whatever race, or creed or calling, whether they be with us or against us in this fight'.³¹

A culture of women supporting one another was a foundational principle of early feminist activism and suffrage societies' events and media created a public environment for this to thrive. Women's talents, achievements and successes were regularly reported on by suffrage publications to build pride among society members, to keep up spirits with good news and convince anyone reading the magazine of women's substantial social, economic and cultural contributions. Women's successes in the field of photography were reported in The Vote on 11 November 1911, in a 'women's work' feature about the recent Arts and Crafts exhibition hosted by The Englishwoman. The report begins: 'To enter the Maddox-Street Gallery any day up to November 14 is to realise the excellent work women are doing to make life comfortable and beautiful'.32 The report continues, '[w]hen it came to photography, there was "an embarrassment of riches with such skilled workers as Miss Lena Connell, Miss Ellen Macnaughten, Miss Winifred Prout and Miss V Cotton" '. 33 The following year, when Lena Connell won a gold medal at the Professional Photographers' Association, Votes for Women congratulated her, capitalising on her links to the movement by commenting that 'Miss Connell has taken many pictures of Suffrage leaders and workers'.³⁴ The Common Cause also reported on Connell's achievement, drawing explicit attention to the fact that her establishment was entirely staffed by women workers and again that she had photographed many suffrage leaders. It also pointed out that the 'prize portrait was the head of a girl'. 35 By broadcasting these photographers' achievements and their dedication to supporting the interests of

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devote their work in the most profitable manner to the furtherance of the agitation.' (*Votes for Women*, 4 October 1907, p. 1.) The newspaper covered all aspects of the campaign strategies such as details of meetings and events, reports on imprisoned suffragettes, WSPU funds, parliamentary legislation affecting women and reports of women's position nationally and internationally.

³⁰ Atkinson, p. 75.

³¹ Votes for Women, 4 October 1907, p. 1.

³² The Vote, 11 November 1911, p. iii.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Votes for Women, 17 May 1912, p. 527.

³⁵The Common Cause, 16 May 1912, p. 92.

women to their readerships, suffrage newspapers built up women photographers' reputations, promoted their skills and sent a strong message about the value of their work. This reinforced the notion that women photographers were serious competitors to their male counterparts in the industry and encouraged suffrage supporters and activists to use their services.

In fact, suffrage societies made a political strategy of encouraging the readers of their publications to support women's work by patronising businesses that were run by members of suffrage unions or were sympathetic to the cause. Commercial photographers such as Lena Connell were endorsed in suffrage publications' directories of businesses owned and operated by activists and allies of the cause. *Votes for Women* proclaimed: 'Help Yourself! Help Your Cause! By Shopping With –' followed by recommendations of businesses that shared their politics, such as Connell's. ³⁶ Advertisements emphasised the political agency that could be expressed through consumption by advising readers to 'Be wise' and 'spend your money on women's work'. ³⁷

These directives of economic solidarity were designed to protect the interests of women as a subjugated group and strengthen their socioeconomic position. By choosing to advertise in these publications and invite a clientele engaged in (or supportive of) suffrage activism, photographers like Connell's day-to-day trading became politicised. Feminist politics were actively invited into her studio as campaigners, having seen Connell's listing in suffrage newspapers and her iconic portraits of their leaders, decided to patronise her business, knowing that in doing so, they were supporting the work of the union.

This economic solidarity worked both ways, as women photographers offered discounted rates to their comrades. The Women's Library collection holds a letter from Lena Connell to the radical lesbian actress (and chauffeur to the Pankhursts) Vera Holme, also known as 'Jack', in which the photographer offers Holme the same concessionary price previously negotiated with another high-profile suffrage activist. Connell writes:

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³⁶ Votes for Women, 17 April 1914, p. 446.

³⁷ The Suffragette, 28 November 1913, p. 150.

I will be pleased to take the muse on the same terms as Mrs. Haverfield [...] if any ordinary layman or woman asks, who are not subjects for concession will you let them have one of the enclosed. You should be taken on the 'same terms as they are, or may be granted to ______'. Oh dear I'm off on suffrage – i'll be pleased to give you the same terms is what I mean.³⁸

This source provides a valuable insight into the ways that women photographers' work became politicised at this moment, and specifically how they balanced their commercial and political interests. The tone of the letter is informal: Connell makes a joke, ironically using legal-speak that we can assume had a clear resonance for a devoted militant like Holme. The humour generates a connection and solidarity between women who were united by a shared cause. Connell then brings the matter back to business ('Oh dear I'm off on suffrage') and clarifies that the rates offered to 'the muse' also extend to Holme. While the purpose of the exchange is to arrange concessionary terms grounded in political solidarity, Connell did not miss the opportunity to market her services beyond the contract at hand. She enclosed another document, most likely a form of business card featuring a price list, along with her letter (this has not been preserved) and asked Holme to share this with any 'ordinary' folk making enquiries (the type of clientele that were Connell's bread and butter). For her suffragette sisters, however, Connell negotiated different terms. Connell had recently photographed Evelina Haverfield and reproduced the portraits as postcards [fig. 30]. Haverfield and Holme were romantic partners, therefore its almost certainly the case that Haverfield recommended Connell to Holme on the basis of her own sitting.³⁹ Holme enquired about prices on someone else's behalf, and perhaps also for herself, given Connell's response. We cannot know for certain who 'the muse' was, but it is possible that it was Emmeline Pankhurst [Fig. 22], who employed Holme as her chauffeur. Pankhurst's fame, status as leader of the suffrage society that Connell belonged to, and her cultivation of a devoted following would perhaps have warranted

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³⁸ Lena Connell to Vera Holme, 1910, 7VJH/4/3/045, Women's Library at LSE. Emphasis in original.

³⁹ Holme and Haverfield lived together in Devon from 1911. Their shared possessions included a bed with 'E.H. and V.H.' carved on the sides. Holme also wrote a biography of Haverfield. Elizabeth Crawford, p. 289.

a free sitting, but as Connell had previously charged Haverfield it is possible that she always asked for certain costs to be covered, no matter the eminence of the subject.

Another example of women photographers contributing to this feminist solidarity economy is provided by Muriel Darton, who ran a studio in Hornsey, London, and was a member of the WSPU. In January 1910 she placed an advertisement in *Votes for Women* offering photographic services to the campaign. Darton stated that she would be 'very glad to undertake photographic work of any kind on terms which merely cover the actual cost of materials in all cases where it may be of service in advancing the propaganda work of the WSPU'. ⁴⁰ Darton was a passionate activist. When enrolling herself in the WSPU she stated that,

The abominable and degrading attitude of the present Government towards the Suffragettes has entirely dispelled any lingering doubt which may have existed in my mind regarding the wisdom of militant tactics, and I am proud to become a member of a society whose adherents have shown themselves to be so entirely self-sacrificing and noble.⁴¹

Despite her belief in the 'wisdom' of militancy, Darton does not seem to have engaged in it herself. Instead, her activism lay in the production of photographic propaganda for the suffrage movement, and she made this an enduring commitment. In late 1911, the published minutes from a drawing-room meeting of the North Islington and Hornsey branch of the WSPU to which the photographer belonged gave 'grateful thanks...to Miss Darton for her photographs'. Darton's only surviving portraits are of notable militant suffragettes Theresa Garnett (who famously assaulted Winston Churchill with a dog whip) and Lilian Dove-Wilcox (bodyguard to Emmeline Pankhurst), which were reproduced in *Votes for Women* to accompany a lengthy article about their court trials. She also made a group portrait of the Church Suffrage League, a print of which is held in the Women's Library. Darton's political activism extended beyond the

⁴⁰ Votes for Women, 21 January 1910, p. 271.

⁴¹ Votes for Women, 29 October 1909, p. 76.

⁴² Votes for Women, 22 December 1911, p. 197. Darton became the secretary of the North Islington and Hornsey branch of WSPU. *The Suffragette*, 3 July 1914, p. 209.

⁴³ Votes for Women, 6 August 1909, pp. 1038–39.

campaign for suffrage. After war broke out and campaigning was suspended, the photographer joined the East London Federation of Suffragettes' socialist project, set up by Sylvia Pankhurst to combat poverty, where she produced portraits of mothers and babies at community events.⁴⁴

As a feminist, Darton's choice of profession was not incidental. For her, running a photographic business had emancipatory potential, and she was keen to encourage other women to consider it as an option. She actively endorsed photography as a liberating and rewarding profession for women in an article for the *Church League for Women's Suffrage* on 'Careers for Women'. In this feature the photographer gives practical advice to women on photographic training and estimates the costs of setting up in business. Darton's staunch feminist principles are strongly present in her sense of injustice at the gendered double standards that existed within the photographic profession:

Indeed, the profession as a whole is very conservative, and the writer was amused to notice in a leading professional photographic journal a comment on the 'distasteful display' on the part of an enterprising women press photographer who 'rushed past a motor car' to obtain a snapshot of a celebrity about to drive away. Why it should be more distasteful for a woman to 'rush round a motor car' than one of the opposite sex can only be imagined.⁴⁶

Darton asserts that, 'There is no doubt that the present time offers to women an even greater opportunity than ever before of making their mark in a profession which calls for the energy and resource which we have learned to associate with the modern woman'.⁴⁷

Here Darton makes an explicit connection between professional photography and a new, empowered mode of womanhood. Section two of this chapter looks closely at the role that women's photographic portraiture played in the construction of the

⁴⁴ Woman's Dreadnought, 19 December 1914, p. 160.

⁴⁵ Muriel Darton, 'Careers for Women VI – Photography', *Church League for Women's Suffrage*, 1 September 1915, p. 13 (p. 13).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

modern woman to which Darton refers, but what emerges here is that photography (and studio portraiture in particular) was not only an integral tool that helped to represent this figure, visually and culturally, but it served as a vehicle for women's emancipation in material terms.

In Connell's letter and Darton's advertisement we see women contributing to a feminist economy premised on solidarity through their photographic practice. As shown by Darton's article and Connell's comment that 'every woman who has to work for herself is an unconscious suffragist', commercial photographic work was inherently politicised for these women. Before moving on to consider women's portraits of suffrage activists in more detail, I want to consider one more way that women photographers' commercial and political interests were enmeshed through the suffrage press.

Suffrage publications also acted as a space for professional women to network and photographers made use of this opportunity, seeking to recruit apprentices or studio staff through this platform. For example, in September 1909 an advertisement was posted in *Votes for Women* by Jeanie Welford. It read: 'Lady Photographer (medallist) has vacancy for lady pupil (residential) to learn artistic portraiture. Well-appointed home. Highest references. One guinea weekly – Mrs. Welford, Alston Lodge, Ilford.'⁴⁸ Welford was a very successful photographer who ran studios in London, Birmingham and Rottingdean and during her career she won many awards for her photographs.⁴⁹ The extent of Welford's engagement with the suffrage campaign is not known, but she was certainly concerned with challenging gendered norms – in 1880 she became the first female member of a bicycle club.⁵⁰

As well as established women photographers recruiting assistants through the suffrage press, this also worked the other way around as publications facilitated the employment searches of female photographers earlier in their career. The photographers that advertised in *Votes for Women* were evidently keen to work alongside members of their own gender, given the nature of the publication they were

⁴⁸ 'Situations Vacant', *Votes for Women*, 3 September 1909, p. 1143.

⁴⁹ David Webb, 'Welford', ed. by John Hannavy, *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 1484–85.

⁵⁰ Victoria Hazel, 'Jeanie Welford: The First Female Member of Cycling UK', *Cycling UK*, 2016 https://www.cyclinguk.org/article/cycling-guide/jeanie-welford [accessed 29 April 2019].

advertising in and its readership. Some 'situations wanted' adverts expressly state this. For example: 'Lady would like to assist lady in Photographic business. Has had thorough training, and three years constant practice – box 190 'Votes for Women' office, 4 Clements Inn'. ⁵¹ And in others it is implicit: 'Photographic operator. Young lady with West End experience, requires berth; high class work only. Nettie Howard, 3 Brunswick Square, WC'. ⁵² Nettie Howard was seeking 'berth', a live-in arrangement, which would only have been respectable with another woman. This style of residential apprenticeship with a more established female photographer was fairly common. It offered women a way of working and living that meant they could build professional identities and cultivate fulfilling lives outside of the conventional route to become a wife and mother. Howard was looking for a role as an operator, which would have been hard to find in male-run firms, as discussed in chapter one. Male operators and studio owners did not typically want female competition in these roles and so female employees were consistently given more menial roles with little to no opportunity for progression.

Yevonde's autobiography provides a pupil's perspective on how women seeking to join the photographic profession were recruited by established women photographers through suffrage networks. Yevonde was a self-declared 'ardent suffragette' in her late teens. As explored in chapter two, she was bored with the pampered, 'ineffectual' lifestyle laid out for 'respectable suburban girls' like her. Rejecting the path of marriage and motherhood altogether, she decided instead to earn her own living. Yevonde's suffrage activism consisted of hosting meetings, at which high-profile campaigners such as Evelyn Sharp spoke, and she also sold *The Suffragette* magazine on the streets of London. When Yevonde came across an advertisement placed in the magazine by Lena Connell, who was then seeking a

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⁵¹ Votes for Women, 5 November 1908, p. 103.

⁵² Votes for Women, 21 May 1915, p. 8.

⁵³ Yevonde, p. 23.

⁵⁴ Yevonde, p. 33.

⁵⁵ The Suffragette was published in 1912 after the Pankhursts' split with Fred and Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, who had been the editors of *Votes for Women* and major benefactors of the WSPU. The split was caused by disagreements over the escalating militant tactics of the WSPU. After the split, the Pethick-Lawrences ran *Votes for Women*, which was grouped around their 'Votes for Women Fellowship'. As the WSPU took more extreme measures the Home Office tried to suppress *The Suffragette*, intimidating stockists in hope of neutralising their radical action. Elizabeth Crawford, p. 460.

photographic apprentice, she decided to apply. Yevonde recalls in her autobiography their first meeting:

Miss Connell was a tall, grave woman who wore her hair parted in the middle and drawn tightly each side of her face. She wore a severe blue serge dress, and round her neck a large, old fashioned locket hung from a golden chain. She received me in the reception-room, which was furnished in rather sombre colours. On a table were piles of sepia-toned photographs on dark brown mounts. The photographs were natural and well posed. She showed me pictures of Mrs Pankhurst, Christabel Pankhurst, Cicely Hamilton and Mrs. Despard. All my heroines. If only I could ever become great enough to take such wonderful celebrities!⁵⁶

Yevonde was evidently inspired (and, it seems, slightly intimidated) by her visit to Connell's studio. Connell offered her the role, but she turned it down, deciding that St John's Wood was too far for her travel for work. Instead, she opted to train under Lallie Charles but retained her feminist spirit and went on to develop a daring, playful aesthetic and become a pioneer of colour photography. It is tempting to speculate on the different career and style that Yevonde might have created had she trained under the 'grave' Connell in her 'sombre' studio. Certainly, Yevonde's autobiography illuminates the emancipatory potential that photography held for a young woman in the early twentieth century.

As explained in chapter one, the photographic industry was not one where women dominated in this period, and their progress was stymied within male firms where access to the creative roles was fiercely guarded. However, women photographers who advertised employment opportunities in the politicised space of the suffrage press signalled their investment in the advancement of fellow women. The alliances that were formed through these pages would certainly have strengthened women's position in the industry as established photographers like Lena Connell and Jeanie Welford grew their businesses with employees who shared their

⁵⁶ Yevonde, p. 43.

values. Likewise, apprentice photographers or those earlier in their careers would have opportunities open to them that they would not have had in a male-run firm. This section has explored the various ways that women's practice of studio portraiture became politicised through the feminist movement. As we saw in Connell's letter to Holme offering concessionary terms, her donation of profits from her photography business to the campaign and her studio itself being repurposed for campaign meetings, the commercial and the political were inextricably linked. As business-owners, women photographers benefitted from the suffrage campaign's strategy of *investing* in women, and they reciprocated this support by lending their skills to the work of the movement, lowering their rates in solidarity. In the next section I analyse in depth the portraits that women photographers produced as propaganda for the suffrage movement.

Picturing the Modern Woman

The day after the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies' demonstration on 13th June 1908 the writer and suffragist Laurence Housman wrote to his friend Janet Ashbee summarising the day's events. In his letter, he remarked in particular on the 'large number of beautiful and noble types' amongst the ten thousand women marching and asserted that 'the twentieth-century type is something quite new: - hatched in the nineteenth century of course, but not yet registered down in portraiture as I suppose it will be before long'. ⁵⁷ I cite Housman's observation here because it affirms first of all the transformation that femininity was undergoing in this period; specifically, it attests to the emergence of the 'twentieth-century type', a modern woman who was the subject of much commentary in the press at the time – an evolution of the oft-caricatured 'New Woman' of the 1890s. ⁵⁸ But more significantly, Housman also draws a direct relationship between contemporary portraiture and these changing constructions of femininity. The vocabulary he uses to predict that this new 'type' of woman will be 'registered down in portraiture' suggests

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⁵⁷ Laurence Housman to Janet Ashbee, 14 June 1908 (Ashbee Journals, King's College, Cambridge) cited in Tickner, p. 192.

⁵⁸ See Tickner, pp. 182 – 192 for a discussion of societal fears of the 'New Woman' and the 'modern woman'

that he is speaking about photographic portraiture, his language evoking the coding of photography as a tool used to document and categorise. Housman's observation connects the modern woman with photographic representation of the period, but in his imagining portraiture is figured as passive – it will merely record manifestations of this modern woman. However, I suggest that when it came to images of progressive women at this time photographic portraiture did not have such a straightforwardly passive, 'documentary' role; instead of just representing the modern woman, or so-called 'twentieth-century type', I argue that photographic portraiture was instrumental in *constructing* her. In this section I look closely at examples of suffrage portraits by Lena Connell and Marie Leon, with a view to deciphering *how* they constructed the image of a modern, politically engaged woman – the image that suffragists relied on to shore up their credibility in the brutal and misogynistic political arena.

As militancy escalated from 1906, with tactics such as hunger striking and damage to property, suffrage activists were represented as deviant traitors to womanhood and threats to the social order. Corrosive press coverage of militant suffrage activity and anti-suffrage campaigning represented suffragettes as a hysterical 'shrieking sisterhood' through surveillance photographs and press shots of violent arrests [Fig. 19 is an example]. In May 1914 *The Daily Mirror* even published a piece on 'The Suffragette Face: New Type Evolved By Militancy' [Fig. 20], a montage of surveillance photographs of suffragettes that exploited the Victorian pseudoscience of physiognomy (note the use of the words 'type' and 'evolved' in the headline) to 'illustrate' how feminism made women ugly and irate. ⁵⁹ Suffrage activists were also portrayed in cruel satires as monstrous; some representations were even disturbingly racist, for example figure 21 shows a suffragette with dark skin and caricatured Africanised features.

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⁵⁹ Tickner, p. 170.



Figure 19: Surveillance Photograph of Militant Suffragettes by Criminal Record Office, silver print mounted onto identification sheet, 1914, ©National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure 20: 'The Suffragette Face', The Daily Mirror, May 25, 1914, p. 5.

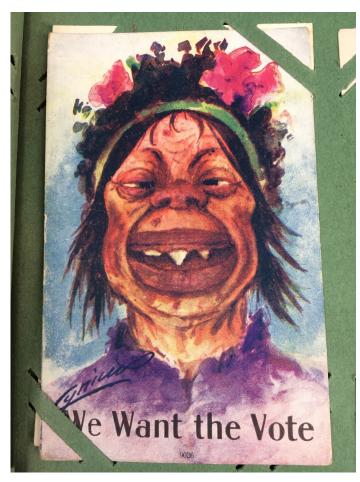


Figure 21: Anti-suffrage postcard, c. 1907 - 1914, Museum of London.

The suffragettes' retaliation to this aggressive profiling was to place a great emphasis on maintaining feminine, dignified and modest appearances that conformed to conventional standards of femininity (the wearing of hats and dresses, for example); in demonstrations they wore white to communicate purity and innocence. There were deviations from this norm in some women's choices to wear 'artistic', or more masculine dress, as I will go on to explore, but in the main activists wanted to appear as conforming, respectable members of society who ought to be taken seriously and who had been forced to take extreme action as a result of institutionalised and systematic injustices against women. Suffrage activists strove to counteract this pervasive negative representation by commissioning photographic portraits of the movement's leading figures that would restore their respectability and integrity. These

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⁶⁰ Atkinson, pp. 95–96, 320.

carefully constructed, dignified studio portraits gave credence to the cause and ultimately made celebrities of suffrage personalities, as we will consider now.

Lena Connell's photographic style was intense and atmospheric, but also robust and earthy, her bromide postcard prints deepened with rich sepia toning. Connell always used a dark background, often modelling her subjects against the wooden panelling in her studio, which imbues the photographs with a sober and sincere quality. Referencing the baroque tradition, Connell's characteristic chiaroscuro, or 'Rembrandt', lighting lends a clarity of form that evokes reason and enlightenment whilst also providing drama and dynamism.

In Connell's portrait of Emmeline Pankhurst [Fig. 22], one of a series of Pankhurst in three variant poses sold by the Women's Press, the WSPU leader leans forward over a desk with hands clasped – the body language of authority – with her expression open, even expectant.⁶¹ It is as if we have an appointment with her and she is listening attentively to what we have to say. Connell represents Pankhurst as approachable, engaged and distinguished. To be pictured at a desk (a universal symbol of power in itself) and posed with a book or a scroll is to be represented engaged in the work of the mind, indicating learnedness, a trope borrowed from portraits of Great Men, which are in no short supply throughout the history of art.

At the bottom of this portrait Connell's name, address and the name of her sitter are incorporated into the photographic frame. While serving a practical function of copyrighting and promoting her work, the handwritten element is idiosyncratic to the majority of Connell's portrait postcards. This caption was produced by writing in black ink in reverse on the emulsion side of the negative, which would then print as white. It was a common practice for studios to copyright their images this way and kits existed to efficiently produce regulated type. However, Connell appears to have preferred to write freehand into the material structure of the photograph, printing her name alongside her sitter's. Sometimes Connell's name features without the sitter's, in large, unwieldy letters that somewhat interrupt the image – see figure 32, for

⁶² Robert Bogdan and Todd Weseloh, *Real Photo Postcard Guide: The People's Photography* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006), p. 43.

⁶¹ Advertisement: 'The Woman's Press, 156 Charing Cross Road, W.C., have on sale special photos of Mrs Pankhurst, taken by Miss Lena Connell. Three positions 2/6 each', *Votes for Women*, 12 May 1911, p. 530.

example. Clearly this gesture of signing was important to Connell; by indexically affixing her name to the activist represented in the portrait, the photographer declares ownership of the image and makes a bold statement of her political allegiance.



Figure 22: Emmeline Pankhurst by Lena Connell, toned bromide postcard print, c. 1910, 135 mm x 85 mm, National Portrait Gallery, London.

To return to Connell's aesthetic, it is interesting to note that the young Madame Yevonde was struck by the 'natural' quality of Connell's photographs when she visited her studio to interview for an apprenticeship. The naturalism of Connell's aesthetic was evidently an element that appealed to suffrage activists who needed to carefully balance their portrayal as intelligent and commanding figures, yet relatable and genuine, 'ordinary' people. This balance is demonstrated well by Connell's portrait of the writer and suffragist Beatrice Harraden [Fig. 23]. Harraden rests her left hand on a desk with papers open on it. She looks intently into the camera, reading glasses still perched on her nose. There is a sense of movement to her pose: her right hand is curled up, as if she has just risen from her work and her mouth is animated, as if she is about to speak. Harraden appears industrious, even a little scruffy, with flyaway hairs and beads that haven't been straightened. The effect of Connell's posing is authenticity – her sitter looks dignified and scholarly without appearing lofty.



Figure 23: Beatrice Harraden by Lena Connell, postcard print, c.1908 - 1913, 135 mm x 82 mm, Women's Library at LSE.

This sense of action and vocation was integral to Connell's project in photographing suffragists. Take, for example, her portrait of Australian activist Muriel Matters [Fig. 24], who lectured tirelessly on the Women's Freedom League 'Caravan Tour' of the south-east counties and Wales in the summer of 1908 to recruit rural women to the cause. Matters is photographed mid-speech gesticulating toward something, or someone, beyond the frame. Connell represents her as a woman with a voice – a dynamic, active and powerful woman, who represents all the suffrage activists who spoke with composure and authority on street corners and in parks

⁶³ David Doughan, *Porter, Muriel Lilah Matters- [Née Muriel Lilah Matters]* (1877–1969), Suffragist and Feminist (Oxford University Press, 2015)

http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-63878>.

throughout the campaign, overcoming harassment from the crowd and even risking personal injury. Connell's portrait of Matters simultaneously evokes a moment of inspiration – the subject's eyes and hands are raised aloft – and a tradition of artists depicting their sitters in a way that articulates their occupation. For example, in Carl Fredrik von Breda's portrait of James Watt [Fig. 25] the inventor is shown pondering over plans for his condenser. In Connell's portrait, Matters is shown wearing a large hat, attire that directly links her to the public (masculine) arena and is in the process of passionately orating an argument or imparting knowledge: she is represented as a figure of enlightenment.



Figure 24: Muriel Matters by Lena Connell, c. 1908, postcard print, 86 mm x 136 mm, Women's Library at LSE.

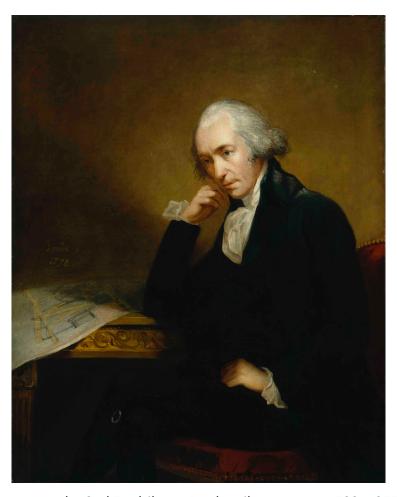


Figure 25: James Watt by Carl Fredrik von Breda, oil on canvas, 1792, 1257 mm x 1003 mm, National Portrait Gallery, London.

The muscularity and complexity of Connell's portraits of women contrast strongly with portraits taken by her contemporaries such as Lallie Charles and Rita Martin [Figs. 26 – 27]. As chapters five and six explore, Charles and Martin represented their female subjects as delicate, beguiling and ornamental, swathed in flowers and flowing fabrics. Connell's portraits, by contrast, are radical portraits that deconstruct normative conceptions of femininity. As the suffrage campaign accelerated and activists were publicly derided as mannish, ugly and sexually-deviant, Connell did not try to counter this by cultivating an image of the 'womanly woman' (as was a tactic of many campaigners). Instead, she recuperated the stereotype of a mannish feminist, carefully selecting elements of masculinity – authority, intellect, even virility – to incorporate into her portraits of women. Connell herself, after all, was described by Yevonde as 'grave' and 'severe', ostensibly not conforming to the feminine ideal in her personal presentation. Certainly, within Connell's studio there doesn't seem to have been any

division along gendered lines in the styling and posing of male and female sitters. See for example, the similarity in the posing of George Lansbury [Fig. 28], the politician, who is seated with an open book, and Constance Lytton, the activist, also seated with an open book, decorated with her WSPU medals for hunger striking [Fig. 29]. Consider also Connell's statuesque portrait of activist and aid worker Evelina Haverfield [Fig. 30] with her broad shoulders filling the frame, arms crossed, wearing a dandyish, tailored riding jacket with a high collar and posing with a steadfast gaze into the lens. The direct light source from the right sculpts Haverfield's features into sharp relief, rendering her noble and commanding: this is a powerful attitude that 'belongs' to portraits of men, a far cry from conventionally feminine portraits of the period.



Figure 26: Helen Mary Avery by Lallie Charles, photogravure, 1900s, 222 mm x 154 mm paper size, National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure 27: Muriel Helen Florence Beckett by Rita Martin, photogravure, 1909, 230 mm x 151 mm paper size, National Portrait Gallery, London.

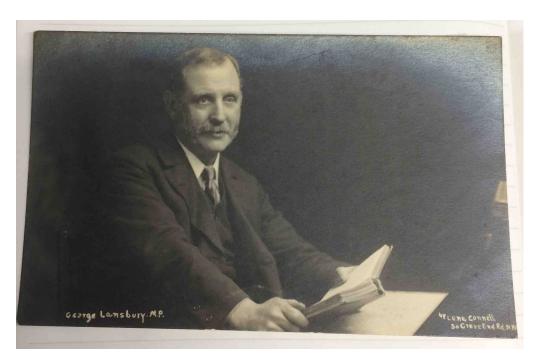


Figure 28: George Lansbury by Lena Connell, postcard print, c. 1910, 83 mm x 133 mm, Museum of London.



Figure 29: Constance Lytton by Lena Connell, postcard print, c.1910, 133 mm x 86 mm, Women's Library at LSE, London.



Figure 30: Evelina Haverfield by Lena Connell, postcard print, c. 1910, 138 mm x 85 mm, Women's Library at LSE, London.

A similar 'masculine' attitude is observable in portraits of the feminist writer and founder of the Women Writers' Suffrage League, Cicely Hamilton [Figs. 31 – 32].⁶⁴ Hamilton's body dominates the frame of the photograph – entirely at odds with Lallie Charles's style where her female subjects are suspended, as pretty, mirage-like, floating heads through the heavily-stylised retouching out of the background [Fig. 33]. Connell made several portraits of Hamilton, but a double portrait of her and her artistic collaborator Edith Craig [Fig. 34], the openly lesbian costumier and theatre director, might be the most radical. These women embodied an alternative lifestyle for

⁶⁴ Connell's portrait of Hamilton [fig. 31] had political appeal for second wave feminist activists, who claimed it as part of their heritage and reproduced in the Feminist Arts News: 'Opening the Pages of the Past', Feminist Arts News, 2.5 (undated – c. 1987), 23–26.

women where female friendship and collaboration were chosen over marriage and where artistic production was valued over procreation. This is exactly what Connell draws out in the portrait. Connell represents Hamilton and Craig as intimates: their bodies touching, slotting together, in sympathy, in solidarity. Hamilton is positioned at an angle that frames Craig almost protectively; she gazes attentively – even adoringly – at Craig, who invites us into the scene, leaning toward us with an assured gaze that meets ours.

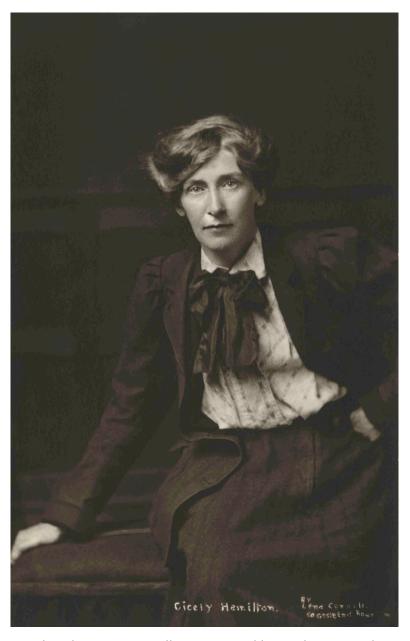


Figure 31: Cicely Hamilton by Lena Connell, sepia-toned bromide postcard print, 1910s, 135 mm x 84 mm, National Portrait Gallery, London.

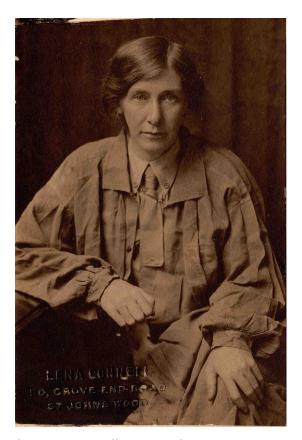


Figure 32: Cicely Hamilton by Lena Connell, postcard print, c.1907-1914, 160 mm \times 100 mm Women's Library at LSE, London.



Figure 33: Kate Savile-Clarke by Lallie Charles, matte printing-out paper panel card, 1901, 231 mm x 157 mm image size, National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure 34: Edith Craig and Cicely Hamilton by Lena Connell, postcard, 1909, 87 mm x 138 mm, Women's Library at LSE, London.

This portrait by Connell was produced to publicise the suffrage play *A Pageant of Great Women* on which Hamilton and Craig collaborated, first performed at the Scala Theatre on 10 November 1909. The conceit of the play is a court trial in which an allegory of Woman, pursued by Prejudice, asks Justice to be granted freedom. Great Women from history are then called upon to give evidence in support of women's freedom. The play is remarkable as a very early example of feminist historical recuperation that we are more familiar with as a feature of second-wave feminism, for example in Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*. The Victorian actress Ellen Terry described the pageant in *Votes for Women* as 'the finest practical piece of political propaganda'. This propaganda was enshrined in photographic portraits of the suffragette performers in character. Connell produced publicity photographs for the *Pageant* that were made into 'accordion' type portfolios and sold in the suffrage

65 Votes for Women, 19 November 1909, p. 117.

shop. ⁶⁶ For the published version of the play, also sold by the suffrage shop, the text was photographically illustrated with portraits of the characters taken by a photographer named Marie Leon in her studio on Regent Street. ⁶⁷ Leon's portraits are a remarkable photographic record of women connecting performatively to their feminist foremothers – embodying rebels, rulers, martyrs, saints and cross-dressing warriors. Within these portraits, the identity of the contemporary activist depicted, who was making history in the campaign for suffrage, merges with the identity of the woman she embodies, who already had made history.

One of the most powerful portraits Leon created is of Cicely Hamilton performing as Christian Davies, the Irish woman who disguised herself as a man so that she could join the British Army in 1693. Davies fought in many battles in an attempt to find her lost husband who was a soldier. The portrait shows how Hamilton immersed herself in this role, adopting a masculine, and almost confrontational attitude, positioned straight on to the lens with her arms folded and a direct gaze that meets the viewer's [Fig. 35]. The theatrical context enables this overt display of non-conformity to gender conventions, but it is still a striking image that depicts Hamilton as a formidable figure of dissent. Several of the characters performed in the *Pageant* were women who cross dressed as men to pursue callings that were not considered suitable for women. For example, Edith Craig performed as the painter Rosa Bonheur, the French artist known for her animal paintings, who dressed in male clothing to gain access to abattoirs to make anatomical studies.

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⁶⁶ 'Woman and her Sphere Catalogue 190', Private Collection of Elizabeth Crawford Items: #14168 #14169 #14170 #14171 #14172 https://womanandhersphere.com/2015/12/10/books-and-ephemera-for-sale-catalogue-190/

⁶⁷ Connell contributed just one photograph – the portrait of Ellen Terry as Nance Oldfield – for the publication.



Figure 35: Cicely Hamilton as Christian Davies in A Pageant of Great Women, by Marie Leon, postcard, 1909, Women's Library at LSE, London.

Leon's portraits for the publication of *The Pageant of Great Women* do not code the sitter as desirable and glamorous as was common with theatrical portraits of the day (discussed in chapter six). Instead, there is a gravitas to Leon's style. See for reference two of her portraits in the National Portrait Gallery's collection [Figs. 36 – 37]. In her double portrait of Henry and William James the brothers gaze at something beyond the frame, illuminated against a very dark background, which gives the portrait an atmospheric feel [Fig. 36]. In Leon's portrait of Bessie Parkes [Fig. 37], the esteemed feminist writer adjusts her glasses, exuding self-possession and wisdom. In both portraits, Leon imbues her sitters with an eminence but retains a naturalistic feel, similar to Connell's. In technique as well as posing of her sitters, Leon can be compared to Connell, as she too used a bromide toning process to achieve sober, deep browns. The similarity between the photographic aesthetics of these photographer is perhaps

why Hamilton and Craig wanted to collaborate with Leon – clearly, they held Connell's work in high regard and Leon's style would be in keeping with the publicity images that Connell had made for the play, and the one portrait that she contributed to the publication of Ellen Terry.⁶⁸

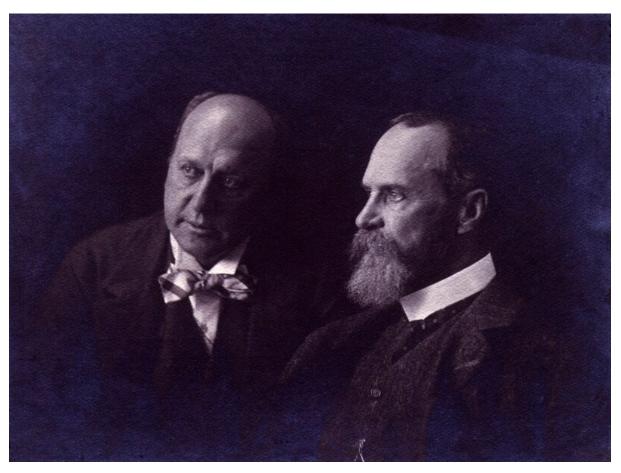


Figure 36: Henry James; William James by Marie Leon, bromide print, early 1900s, 201 mm x 150 mm, National Portrait Gallery.

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⁶⁸ It is unclear why Connell was not commissioned to produce all the portraits for the publication.



Figure 37: Bessie Parkes by Marie Leon, bromide print, 1910, 122 mm x 91 mm, National Portrait Gallery.

Connell's portrait of the activist Lilian M. Hicks [Fig. 38] perfectly encapsulates the photographer's astute handling of art historical traditions in the politics of representation. Hicks is posed at a desk, looking up to meet our gaze from a catalogue of portraits that she has been studying. The page is angled to display Anthony Van Dyck's famous allegorical portrait of Rachel de Ruvigny, Countess of Southampton, as the Goddess of Fortune (c.1640) in which the Countess is depicted majestically enthroned on the clouds as the future swirls in her orb [Fig. 39].⁶⁹ The insertion of this painting works on several levels. Firstly, by drawing a link to celebrated 'Old Master'

⁶⁹ I am grateful to Rab MacGibbon, Curator of 17th and 18th Centuries Collections at the National Portrait Gallery, for his help identifying the portrait in Connell's photograph as Anthony Van Dyck's Rachel de Ruvigny, Countess of Southampton as the goddess Fortune, c. 1640.

portraits of formidable, elite women such as Rachel de Ruvigny, the photographer cannily (perhaps also with tongue-in-cheek) elevates her project of photographing suffrage activists. Secondly, the presence of such an unambiguous iconographic reference to 'fortune' — meaning both prosperity and destiny — within a portrait of a well-known suffragist sends a powerful message about the prophesied triumph of the suffrage campaign. Moreover, the inclusion of this nested image transforms Connell's portrait into a portrait *about* the representation of women; it indicates her fluency in the art historical tradition of portraiture to which she was contributing —and against which she was pushing. With portraits like this one, Connell constructed a radically new visual model for a liberated, autonomous, educated, politically engaged and wholly *modern* woman. Through considered posing, gestures, clothing, lighting and use of props, Connell's portraiture drew out the authority, integrity and tenacity of her sitters, producing an aesthetic entirely fitting with the WSPU motto, 'Deeds Not Words'.



Figure 38: Mrs. Lilian M. Hicks by Lena Connell, postcard print, 1910, 137 mm x 86 mm, Women's Library at LSE, London.



Figure 39: Rachel de Ruvigny, Countess of Southampton as the goddess Fortune by Anthony Van Dyck, oil on canvas, wood, c. 1640, 2224mm × 1316 mm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

Conclusion: The role of studio portraiture in the British suffrage campaign

As explored in the previous section, photographic portraiture played an integral role within the suffrage campaign's publicity campaign. Photographers like Lena Connell and Marie Leon expertly represented the modern woman as composed, educated and authoritative. This new 'twentieth-century type' of femininity, to use Laurence Housman's phrase, that women photographers projected through their portraits of suffrage activists was disseminated widely through framed prints, postcards and 'photo buttons' by the WSPU and WFL and sold in the suffrage shops and at fundraising events across the country to raise funds and promote the cause. 70 As well as raising capital for the movement, the collection, exchange and circulation of these commodities, postcards in particular, was instrumental to the campaign strategy: they made celebrities of suffrage personalities, fostered political networks, strengthened loyalties and served to rally others to the movement. The portraits also promoted this new version of womanhood, inviting others to fashion themselves in this way and adopt the traits exhibited by the women they so admired in the photographs. Before concluding this chapter, I want to consider one final role that studio portraiture played in the campaign for suffrage, to illustrate how the enterprising, commercial spirit that women photographers possessed was channelled into political activism.

From 3rd to 13th June 1913 the WSPU organised 'The Suffragette Summer Festival' in the Empress Rooms on High Street Kensington to raise money for their campaigning. The festival staged a number of 'side shows', one of which was a pop-up photographic portrait studio run by two studio photographers and members of the WSPU, Constance Marsden and Gertrude Lowy. *The Suffragette* billed this as a 'great attraction' that 'promise[d] charming and artistic likenesses' that would be 'well finished' for 5 shillings.⁷¹ Alongside Marsden and Lowy's portrait studio, there were also 'lightning' sketches and silhouettes available, so the paper advised its readers to 'wait for June 3rd to get your portrait taken in any shape or form'.⁷²

⁷⁰ The WSPU had a network of ten suffrage shops within Greater London and seventeen shops nationally, including in Scotland and Wales. Murray, p. 207.

⁷¹ The Suffragette, 16 May 1913, p. 518.; The Suffragette, 23 May 1913, p. 529.

⁷² 23 May 1913.

As we saw in chapter two, the woman photographers' studio in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was rhetorically and conceptually associated with domesticity and the private realm of genteel femininity. This connection was mobilised to work in female photographers' favour, giving their service a unique selling point. In the case of Lowy and Marsden's side show, the studio literally became a part of the political public sphere, an historically masculine domain. Certain elements of the Victorian domestic ideology were used strategically within the organisation of this festival. As discussed above, retaining an appearance of feminine respectability was a tactic of the suffrage campaign across its various factions and exercises. But beyond the carefully curated, polite, town-fête-style fundraiser was a radical feminist ambition. Marsden and Lowy volunteered the skills that they had honed earning their respective livings as commercial photographers, to create a temporary portrait studio to raise funds for the WSPU's feminist project. Unfortunately, none of the portraits produced at the fundraiser survive in public collections. Nevertheless, this remains a striking example of how women's commercial photographic practice was re-routed into political activism, providing a counter to the assumption that studio photographers were handmaidens to the status quo.

Gertrude Lowy and Constance Marsden both produced important portraits of notable suffrage figures during their careers. Lowy came from an affluent Jewish family who were heavily engaged in suffrage activism and donated generously to the WSPU.⁷³ In March 1912 she received a medal for hunger striking after being arrested and imprisoned for window smashing.⁷⁴ Lowy had learnt photography from the Pictorial photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn and she clearly had great ambitions as a photographer.⁷⁵ In 1915, two years after she ran the portrait studio for the WSPU fundraiser festival, Lowy travelled to America to study with Clarence H. White, a founding member of the Photo Secession.⁷⁶ White had been teaching his summer

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⁷³ Elizabeth Crawford, p. 359.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ A Letter from Alvin Langdon Coburn to Max Weber dating 10 June 1915 informs Weber that Gertrude Lowy, who had studied photography with Coburn, will be enrolling as a pupil at the School. Max Weber Papers, Archives of American Art, reel N 69 – 85, cited in Anne McCauley, *Clarence H. White and His World The Art and Craft of Photography, 1895-1925* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), p. 283. McCauley refers to Lowy as an 'amateur photographer', but she was in fact running a professional studio.

⁷⁶ McCauley, p. 283..

school in Maine since 1910 and specifically marketed the course towards women.⁷⁷
Four years later, White founded the Clarence H. White School of Modern Photography in New York City. The School became the first educational institution in America to teach the aesthetic, as well as technical, aspects of photography, with a specialist 'art appreciation' course led by Max Weber who is also credited with bringing a 'modernist' perspective to the syllabus.⁷⁸ Women were the 'core of White's clientele' and notable female photographers such as Anne Brigman, Margaret Bourke-White and Dorothea Lange feature in White's lists of pupils.⁷⁹ The long journey that Lowy took to attend the White school shows how serious she was about her career as a photographer, but also indicates her desire to develop her practice of Pictorial photography.

Back in London, she had been running her studio at 115 Gower Street (the same street as Alice Hughes's studio), and was photographing prominent suffragettes such as Ada Wright in the Pictorial style she had learnt with Coburn. ⁸⁰ The anonymous press photograph of Wright knocked down in the street by police at the suffragette demonstration at Parliament Square on 18 November 1910, (known as Bloody Friday due to the brutality and sexual violence that the activists were subjected to by police and male bystanders) [Fig. 40] has become one of the defining images of the suffrage period. ⁸¹ Lowy's portrait, by comparison, presents an entirely antithetical representation of Wright [Fig. 41]. It depicts the activist in profile, looking serene and contemplative, and has a decidedly intimate feel. It is interesting to think that these portraits are evidence of Lowy's Pictorial aesthetic developing, and that at the White School she would have furthered her mastery of techniques and processes and obtained points of reference that she needed to develop her practice in this style. When she returned to England, Lowy's photographic aesthetic was strong enough for her to be accepted to exhibit into the 'Pictorial Photography' section of the Sixtieth

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⁷⁷ McCauley, pp. 250–51.

⁷⁸ McCauley, p. 258.

⁷⁹ McCauley, pp. 266–67.

⁸⁰ In the winter of 1913 Gertrude Lowy advertised her services *The Suffragette* and *Votes for Women* several times offering 'Special prices for Christmas'; 'Photographic Portraits. Special Prices for Christmas. ½ plate size, first copy 5/- further copies 2/6. Postcards per doz. 3/-. Gertrude Lowy 115 Gower Street, W.C Tel: Regent 4488'. The ad appears in *The Suffragette*, 5 December 1913, p. 174.; *The Suffragette*, 12 December 1913, p. 200.; *Votes for Women*, 12 December 1913, p. 164.

⁸¹ Elizabeth Crawford, p. 451.

Annual Exhibition of the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain, which ran from 23 August to 2 October 1915. 82 Lowy exhibited works with theatrical, and allegorical titles such as 'Hamlet' and 'Disdain' along with her portraits, including one of the composer Rebecca Clarke. Lowy's commitment to Pictorialism adds a new layer of meaning to the terms 'artistic' and 'charming' in *The Suffragette's* advertisement for the photography side show that she ran with Marsden. Perhaps the attraction or novelty of the 'side show' was that Lowy was making portraits in the Pictorial 'artistic' style, but specifically for, and of, women.

⁸² This was hosted at the Gallery of the Royal Society of British Artists, Suffolk Street, Haymarket. The titles of Lowy's works were 'I think, I think', 'The Profile', 'Hamlet', 'Disdain', 'Rebecca Clarke', 'Her Ladyship'. RPS Exhibition Records Online http://erps.dmu.ac.uk/exhibition details.php?enid=1915

The Daily Mirror

THE MORNING JOURNAL WITH THE SECOND LARGEST NET SALE

No. 2,205.

Registered at the G. P. O. as a Newspaper.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 1910

One Halfpenny.

VIOLENT SCENES AT WESTMINSTER, WHERE MANY SUFFRAGETTES WERE ARRESTED WHILE TRYING TO FORCE THEIR WAY INTO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.



While forcibly endeavouring yesterday to enter the Houses of Parliament, great numbers of suffragettes used more frantic methods than ever before. Above is illustrated in a fainting condition. The photograph shows how far women will go for the vote

Figure 40: The Daily Mirror, 19 November 1910.



Figure 41: Ada Wright by Gertrude Lowy, postcard print, c. 1910, 135 mm x 86 mm, Museum of London.

Constance Marsden was, like Lowy, a passionate member of the WSPU. She sold *Votes for Women* on the streets of London, as Yevonde did, apparently 'delight[ing] in the work,' and her dedication made her an example for other activists.⁸³ *Votes for Women* described Marsden as 'a most energetic and indefatigable seller' and reported that she 'sells in Kensington between two and three hundred copies every week'.⁸⁴ Marsden combined her political activism with her photographic

⁸³ Votes for Women, 23 July 1909, p. 986.

⁸⁴ Votes for Women, 23 July 1909, p. 980. Marsden would leave London as part of the 'Holiday Campaign' to seaside towns for the month of August and sell *Votes for Women*. In October 1910 Marsden won a prize for selling 1,448 copies individually in 3 months (*Votes for Women*, 28 October 1910, p. 50.).

career. Between 1911 and 1912 she studied photography at the Regent Street Polytechnic where she would have studied how to make negatives, printing, operating, finishing, retouching and a variety of processes including colour photography.85 This formal training clearly had an impact on Marsden's portraiture practice as in August/September of 1913, the same year that she ran the fundraising studio with Lowy, her portrait of Emmeline Pankhurst [Fig. 42] was accepted by the Royal Photographic Society for an exhibition at the Royal Society of British Artists. 86 It is unlikely that Marsden made this portrait of Pankhurst at the pop up event; Pankhurst was an honoured celebrity within the campaign, adored by thousands, and so Marsden would have more likely set up a private sitting rather than treating Pankhurst as she would other customers at the fair. The fact that this portrait, which depicts the WSPU leader as noble and reverential with an air of humility, was put forward by the RPS for exhibition connects the world of professional photography with the world of feminist activism. Marsden's portrait was subsequently reproduced in the Graphic on 13 December 1913 and on 26 December 1913 it featured as a full page in 'The Suffragette Special Christmas Number'.87

⁸⁵ Marsden's name is listed on the 'Photography Register for Day and Evening Classes', University of Westminster Archive, The Polytechnic Education Department Records, School Year 1911 – 12 RSP/4/5/5. The syllabus is also listed in this document.

⁸⁶ Elizabeth Crawford, p. 548.

⁸⁷ The advertisement for the issue states that it was a 'twenty-four page number, printed on special paper and containing a full-page photograph of Mrs. Pankhurst by Constance Marsden, which appeared in the *Graphic* of December 13.' (*The Suffragette*, 19 December 1913, p. 235.).

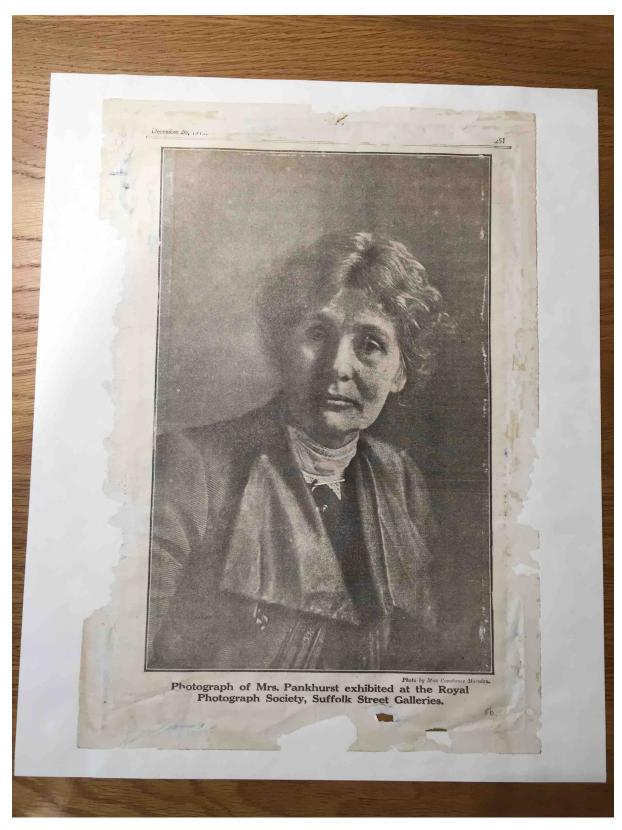


Figure 42: Emmeline Pankhurst by Constance Marsden, The Suffragette, 26 December 1913, p. 251, Women's Library at LSE, London.

Photography played a crucial role at the 1913 Suffragette Summer Festival. Alongside Lowy and Marsden's 'side show' there was a stall selling documentary 'photos of the movement' by a photographer named Miss Home that would 'prove interesting to everyone'. 88 Another stall sold portraits of the leaders, for which *The Suffragette* anticipated a great demand, and special frames in which to put them. 89 New portraits of Emmeline Pankhurst, Christabel Pankhurst, Sylvia Pankhurst, and Flora Drummond were on sale, as well as 'interesting portrait studies of well-known supporters of Woman Suffrage: George Lansbury, Bernard Shaw, Mrs Perkins Gilman, and others; the work of a photographer who is a member of the Union,' *The Suffragette* reported. 90 The photographer being referred to was Lena Connell. 91

This chapter has examined how women's photographic work became politicised and how studio portraiture played an integral role in the British suffrage movement. Professional photographers' achievements were instrumentalised by the movement to demonstrate the injustice of women's political powerlessness when they contributed so much to the country's economy. What is more, the suffrage press enabled women working in the photographic industry to form alliances and thus strengthen their position within it. We have seen how the movement served photographers and how they reciprocated, by offering their services for the purposes of propaganda, and charging concessionary rates for supporters of the cause. Through these arrangements, women photographers contributed to a feminist economy grounded in the principle of solidarity. Their commercial (as well as civic) interests were being served by the campaign, so they contributed their skills to its operations. For both the modern woman behind the camera and the modern woman in front of it, the emancipatory potential of studio portraiture was unmistakable.

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⁸⁸ The Suffragette, 30 May 1913, p. 644.; The Suffragette, 27 June 1913, p. 624.

⁸⁹ *The Suffragette*, 9 May 1913, p. 500.

⁹⁰ *The Suffragette*, 6 June 1913, p. 560.

⁹¹ Connell made portraits of all these individuals. Charlotte Perkins Gilman Papers, 1846-1961; Photographs; 2 photographs by Lena Connell, London, [1905?]. Collection 177, folder 327. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Harvard University. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:RAD.SCHL:3163270 [Accessed 10 April 2019].

Chapter 5

Lallie Charles's Factory of Femininity: Beauty, Celebrity and Spectacle

In 1907 the satirical magazine *Punch* announced the return of a perennial debate: 'which is the better looking sex?'¹ The 'Charivaria' section of the magazine, which offered witty commentary on current affairs, outlined a discussion between three prominent experts in the cultivation of beauty and bodily spectacle. Louis N. Parker, the man who invented the historical pageant, and Eustace Miles, a health and fitness guru, both agreed that the 'gift of beauty is equally divided' between men and women.² Dissenting opinion came from the only female representative in the debate, the well-known portrait photographer Madame Lallie Charles; Charles disagreed with the other two judges and wished to 'award the palm loyally to women'.³ To prevent any further escalation, *Punch*'s writer quipped that the matter ought to be sent to the 'Hague Tribunal' (International Criminal Court) for expert mediation.⁴

Readers of *Punch* could have counted on Charles's loyalty to women, given that her profession – the close scrutiny and photographic rendering of the female form – made her a connoisseur of idealised femininity. At this time, the photographer monopolised the new publications dedicated to the spectacle of celebrity women: her portraits flooded the pages of the leading titles of the day – in particular Society magazines such as *The Tatler, The Sketch, The Bystander, Country Life* – and periodicals had been running extended articles on her business since 1899. Charles's portraits were displayed on the front covers of magazines and newspapers that were stocked at newsagents, railways stations and kiosks across the country, becoming a distinctive part of the popular visual culture of the early twentieth century. As a photographer Charles was prolific: in 1907 she was experiencing her busiest year since opening her

¹ 'Charivaria', Punch, 14 August 1907, p. 109.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Morton Lane.; McDonald.; 'Madame Lallie Charles's Portraits'.; 'Madame Lallie Charles', *The Lady's World*.

studio in 1896, taking hundreds of plates of women and girls a day.⁶ A year before her mention in *Punch*, Charles was being discussed as 'one of the foremost photographers of the day' and a full page was dedicated to her self-portrait in *The Tatler* with the title 'A Prominent Lady Photographer'.⁷ According to *The Bystander* celebrities would 'flock' in 'their hundreds' to Charles's photographic studio and by 1910, her portraits of Society 'beauties' reached international fame through regular publication in American *Vogue*.⁸

Why, given the public recognition of Charles's work during her lifetime and the ubiquity of her portraits, has she not been better represented in histories of this period? If we look across the intersecting scholarship on photography, celebrity, popular culture, performance, fashion, femininity and print culture in this period her name is conspicuously absent. A superficial look at the vast body of work that Charles produced in her lifetime could return a judgement of homogeneity and conservatism, especially if held up against contemporaneous avant garde visual cultures. The ways in which her style evolved are not as legible or dramatic as a fine artist of this period; there are not clearly defined thematic or stylistic 'periods' of her image-making as in Picasso's 'blue' or 'rose' periods, for instance. A shift in Charles's style was denoted by a new prop – for example the lattice window that became a regular feature in her work after 1907 – or a series of poses rather than a new process or discernibly new aesthetic. Charles remained loyal to the same photographic technique and method, known for her lavish, creamy, pink-toned prints until the end of her career, and it was this failure to evolve her practice that in part precipitated her professional decline and

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⁶ Marion Leslie, 'A Photographer of Beautiful Girlhood: A Visit to the Studio of Madame Lallie Charles', *The Girl's Realm*, May 1907, 537–43 (p. 540).

⁷ 'A Prominent Lady Photographer', *The Tatler*, 25 April 1906, p. 118.

⁸ The Bystander, 25 April 1906, p. 170. Charles's portraits appear in *The Sketch* from 1900 and *The Tatler* from 1901, the year it was founded. Charles and Martin's portraits dominated 'The Camera in Society' feature in *The Tatler* from 1908. Charles's portraits appear in American Vogue from 1910 to illustrate reports on Society women and theatre news and accompanied the 'European Interests' feature from 1911.

⁹ For example Charles is not mentioned in key texts such as Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).; Valerie Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism: Ideals of Feminine Beauty from the Victorian Era to the Jazz Age* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).; Sharon Marcus, *The Drama of Celebrity* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2019).; *The Edwardian Sense: Art, Design and Performance in Britain, 1901 – 1910*, ed. by Morna O'Neill and Michael Hatt (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010).; Joel H. Kaplan and Sheila Stowell, *Theatre and Fashion: Oscar Wilde to the Suffragettes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

subsequent bankruptcy in 1915.10

In Charles's portraits an (almost always) white woman in a pale dress is posed on a Chippendale chair or standing gracefully at a plinth, holding a prop such as flowers or a book.¹¹ The lighting used, referred to in the photographic discourse of the time as 'conservatory' lighting, is natural and soft. As a contemporary commentator observed, in Charles's portraits '[t]he shadows merge into the highlights with a delicacy of gradation that is remarkable'. 12 The backdrop is light, an innovation of her own that became a distinguishing feature of Charles's style. 13 If we look at figures 43 – 47, all portraits of the much-photographed Princess Patricia of Connaught, taken between 1905 – 1910, these features make Charles's work easy to identify and demonstrate the singularity of her style. 14 Charles posed the Princess against a light ground (and later the signature lattice window) and modelled her with subtle highlights and shade. Tonally the photograph contrasts strongly with the chiaroscuro lighting of Lafayette's portrait. In Charles's 1905 portrait of Patricia [fig. 46] heavy retouching is discernible as the Princess looks as though she emerges within a cloud, her torso fading softly into the background. The heavy post-production manipulation of negatives and elaborate finishing of prints was an aspect of Charles's practice for which she made no apology, and such conspicuous artificiality became a sought-after characteristic of her portrait work. 15 Such strictly composed studio portraits as Charles produced could be considered examples of 'unary' photographs, to use a Barthesian term: 'Like a shop window which shows only one illuminated piece of jewellery, [the unary photograph] is completely constituted by the presence of one thing'. 16 In

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¹⁰ Madame Yevonde, who trained with Charles, attributed her decline in part to this. With regard to technique, Charles used a Voitlinger [sic?] anastigmatic lens and contact prints. To print her portraits, she used a glossy P.O.P., which was matted by squeezing the print while wet on to a piece of ground glass. Prints were then mounted using dry mounting machine. Yevonde, pp. 64–66.

^{&#}x27;In Bankruptcy', The Times, 25 November 1915, p. 3, The Times Digital Archive.

¹¹ Deborah Cherry and Jane Beckett have discussed the overwhelming whiteness of images of women in this period, linking it to discourses of British imperialism. Deborah Cherry and Jane Beckett, *The Edwardian Era* (Oxford: Phaidon Press Limited and Barbican Art Gallery, 1987), p. 81.

¹² Morton Lane.

¹³ Cecil Beaton, British Photographers (London: Bracken Books, 1987), p. 32.

¹⁴ The Queen magazine reported that Charles invented the profile pose against the lattice window and that it proved a 'huge success'. The Queen, 2 July 1910.

¹⁵ McDonald, p. 439.

¹⁶ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), pp. 40–41.

Charles's portraits, the negative space behind the female subject eliminates all distraction and superfluous detail, intensifying the focus on her, displaying and framing her – the dazzling object – as if in a window.



Figure 43: Princess Patricia of Connaught by Lafayette, platinum print, 1902, 173 mm x 117 mm,, National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure 44: Margaret, Crown Princess of Sweden; Princess Patricia of Connaught by W. & D. Downey, published by Rotary Photographic Co Ltd, bromide postcard print, c.1906, National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure 45: Princess Patricia of Connaught by Mendelsohhn, published in The Bystander 1905.



Figure 46: Princess Patricia of Connaught by Lallie Charles, photograph, circa 1905, Royal Collection Trust.



Figure 47: Princess Patricia of Connaught by Lallie Charles, published by J. Beagles & Co, circa 1908, 139 mm x 88 mm, National Portrait Gallery, London.

Charles was running a factory-scale operation. She had her luxurious main premises for receiving sitters and taking their portraits, first at 'The Nook' in Regents Park from 1896 and then an upgraded house in London's fashionable Mayfair area from 1907 with a separate site for production called 'The Works' in St John's Wood, where an all-female team of retouchers, spotters, printers, mounters and finishers toiled.¹⁷ Charles exhibited her work and it was also published in books as well as magazines and newspapers. As the Punch article cited above illustrates, 'Madame Lallie Charles' was a household name, not to mention very wealthy as a result of her labours. 18 Charles was a celebrated 'lady artist of the camera' in her contemporary moment, but now her name is either absent or glossed over. 19

This chapter recuperates Lallie Charles as an arbiter of femininity, arguing that she did not just record or reflect the dominant construction of a feminine ideal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but actively shaped it through her practice of studio portraiture. To make this argument I assess the photographer's cultural importance and influence from three intersecting angles. Firstly, I consider the vehicle of Charles's influence: the burgeoning mass media. The new illustrated journalism propagated from the mid 1890s by publications such as The Tatler, The Sketch and The Bystander established a market for feminine spectacle and Charles became a major manufacturer that fuelled it; her idealised portraits of Society women monopolised the front pages of the leading titles of the day and were disseminated nationally and then internationally. I explore how, in the words of historian Erika Rappaport, '[p]ublicness or publicity became championed as the state in which women acquired an alluring femininity' in the late nineteenth century and how Charles capitalized on this, tapping into the social rituals of the British upper class and their heightened awareness of being on display to secure returning clients and attract new ones.²⁰ Secondly, I consider how Charles achieved popularity with 'great women of the

¹⁷ The Daily Mail reported in October 1907 that 'Mme. Lallie Charles's new studio at 39a, Curzon Street, which has just been opened, is a most attractive place, and decorated with great taste. The scheme of colouring is rose-pink and green and the walls are covered with photographs of many ladies well known in the social world'. Daily Mail, 24 October 1907, p. 4, Daily Mail Historical Archive.

¹⁸ Yevonde's autobiography includes details of Charles's fame and the affluent, sumptuous lifestyle that Charles's professional success afforded her. Yevonde, pp. 44, 48, 54.

¹⁹ McDonald.

²⁰ Rappaport, p. 212.

social world' that enabled her to supply magazines with their portraits. I analyse what was referred to as the Lallie Charles 'treatment' – the practices and style that she developed to construct desirability and fashionability – that furnished the photographer with her reputation. Finally, I consider the aesthetics that made Charles's style of portraiture unique by unpacking the artistic influences that she drew on and commercialised, namely the pastoralism of the eighteenth-century 'fancy picture', the classical revival and borrowed conventions from art photography. Charles's portraits packaged a feminine ideal that synthesised tradition and novelty, eroticism and innocence, vivacity and modesty, and, as we will see, this proved to be a potent concoction that had great appeal for the individuals being portrayed and satisfied a wider public demand for feminine spectacle.

As we will see in this chapter and the one that follows, the celebrity culture of late Victorian and Edwardian Britain cannot be divorced from issues of social class, in particular the erosion of the traditional, hierarchical social system based on inherited land and wealth and the rise of democracy. The respective careers of Lallie Charles and her sister Rita Martin, who is the case study of the final chapter, tell a story about the changing face of celebrity in this period, a story that can be understood as a synecdoche for a broader narrative of the revolutionising impacts of democracy and modernity on British society in the early twentieth century.

Portraiture, celebrity and the media

Charles attributed her success in part to the fact that her career coincided with the explosion of mass printed media in Britain. She set up her first studio, assisted by her two younger sisters Rita and Isabella, at a time when print culture and celebrity culture were rapidly accelerating: two markers of modernity that existed in a symbiotic relationship. A whole new type of journalism emerged, referred to as the 'new illustrated journalism' as improvements to the halftone process meant that text and image could be integrated on the page. New Journalism was a response to the changing pace of life, especially in metropolitan centres; it involved less text and

²¹ 'Madame Lallie Charles's Portraits'.

²² Marcus, *The Drama of Celebrity*, p. 130.

tended toward an easily-consumable, sensational register. Images became the main mode of communicating ideas and information. From the mid 1890s, hybrid newspaper-magazines emerged that were specifically targeted at a female readership. Prior to this, women had not been considered a demographic who consumed newspapers due to their text-heavy nature. Women were understood at the time to be more responsive to visual entertainment and were therefore a target market for illustrated journalism.²³

Celebrity gossip was a major feature of new journalism and front-page portraits of famous women became a defining feature of newspapers such as *The Sketch* (established 1893), *The Penny Pictorial* (1899), *The Tatler* (1901), and *The Bystander* (1903). Numerous studies have detailed the rise of celebrity culture in the late nineteenth century, identifying it as a product of ideological shifts such as the democratisation of society and an increasing emphasis on the individual.²⁴ In Britain, however, the phenomenon of celebrity was bound up with the aristocratic class system that had structured British society for centuries. As media historian Ryan Linkof writes: 'Britain offers a unique and intriguing study into the democratising effects of celebrity culture because British popular culture has a long and enduring relationship with the traditional landed elite'.²⁵ In the new illustrated publications and burgeoning tabloid press the pre-existing fascination with royalty and the nobility merged with the new 'democratic cult of celebrity'.²⁶

From the 1890s, the decline of aristocratic power played out in the pages of the popular press. As Linkof puts it, new print media 'visualized the clash of modern and archaic forms of renown'.²⁷ Out of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century mass media two strands of celebrity femininity emerged: the Society lady and the actress.²⁸ As we shall see in this chapter and the next, the fashioning of these two public feminine identities were the respective specialisms of Lallie Charles and Rita Martin. Although both sisters photographed actresses *and* Society women, Charles

²³ Ryan Linkof, *Public Images: Celebrity, Photojournalism, and the Making of the Tabloid Press* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), pp. 22–23.

²⁴ Most recently Sharon Marcus and Ryan Linkof, cited above.

²⁵ Linkof, p. 10.

²⁶ Linkof, p. 11.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Rappaport, p. 185.

was predominantly associated with the portrayal of an aristocratic feminine ideal and Martin the portrayal of female stage performers of more diverse class backgrounds.

Society personalities and the social rituals and spaces of the aristocracy became a subject of media interest from the 1890s as magazines such as *The Sketch, The Tatler* and *The Bystander* built their business model around the spectacle of the social elite. *The Sketch* was established to provide frivolity and entertainment, reporting on modern urban life, the theatre, Society and celebrity gossip. *The Tatler* took this concept further, responding to a market for celebrity gossip, and focusing more heavily on the lives of Society personalities. In the first edition, the editors claimed that their sole motive was to 'give pleasure', having observed that 'the modern public likes a paper that deals brightly and genially with Society and the Drama [theatre]'.²⁹ The newspaper wanted to 'give the public as many illustrations as can be crowded into our space. So long as the smart lady or the popular actresses dress elaborately, we shall describe and reproduce her costume, and say how nice she looks in it'.³⁰ *The Tatler* soon became one of the most widely read and influential illustrated journals.³¹

Commercial studio portraiture played a central role in the modus operandi of these newspapers. As Sharon Marcus notes in *The Drama of Celebrity*, portraiture was a catalyst of celebrity culture from the eighteenth century, but it was the advent of photography that 'spawned the first modern celebrities'.³² *The Tatler* ran features such as 'The Camera in Society' and 'The Searchlight in Society' in which upper-class women were exhibited as taste makers and held up as role models, their portraits displayed alongside captions that praised their looks, gentility and wealth. Newspapers such as *The Tatler* profited from making a spectacle of the elite, fashionable woman for the consumption and amusement of women from lower social demographics by stoking desire for the glamorous lifestyle she embodied.³³ While there is an undeniably exploitative element of the media interest in Society figures' lives as entertainment, we might also reflect on how this type of attention may in fact have served the women

²⁹ *The Tatler*, 3 July 1901, p. 2. cited in Linkof, p. 23.

³⁰ 3 July 1901. Cited in Linkof, pp. 23–24.

³¹ Linkof, p. 24.

³² Marcus, *The Drama of Celebrity*, p. 19. In the 1890s commentators remarked on the opportunity for success that the new illustrated media provided for both the amateur and professional photographer. Roderick Grey, 'The Art of the Camera', *The Royal Magazine*, January 1899, pp. 204–9 (p. 206).

³³ Linkof, p. 25.

of this class.

Throughout the nineteenth century the domestic sphere was the space where middle-and upper-class women engaged in leisure activities, the purpose of which was to display their husband or father's wealth through their lack of need to undertake waged work. However, as these female demographics moved beyond the home with the industrial and commercial changes of the latter half of the century (through shopping and theatregoing, for example) the feminine ideal came to be constructed through public, rather than private, display. Erika Rappaport has observed that by the fin de siècle '[p]ublicity surpassed domesticity as the ideal realm of gender and even of class formation'. 34 Illustrated newspapers such as The Tatler and The Bystander, therefore, created a new arena for the public display of status and construction of upper-class feminine identities. Women could choose their photographer and fashion themselves in this process with the knowledge that the resulting image was sought after by the press for public dissemination. Charles was immensely popular with 'the great ladies of the social world' and demand for sittings with her grew as her name was shared around social circles.³⁵ As one commentator observed, '[I]adies naturally prefer a lady to photograph them, the more so when all their friends have already been photographed at the same place'. 36 As a result, Charles became a major supplier of their portraits to the newspapers discussed above, and her name dominated the credits in *The Tatler's* 'Camera in Society' feature. Charles's portraits illustrated every appearance of this feature in 1908, and until 1914 the only photographer who rivalled her prevalence was her sister Rita Martin who had set up her own studio in 1906 and worked in a very similar style.

For a girl born into an upper-class family there were certain milestones in her life that a portrait was required to commemorate, most notably in girlhood, usually taken with her mother, as a debutante aged around eighteen, at the time of her engagement, at the time of her marriage, and then following the births of her children. Charles was not only accomplished in photographing adult women, but also in photographing young women and girls. What is more, customers who came to her as

34 Rappaport, p. 212.

³⁵ Leslie, 'A Photographer of Beautiful Girlhood: A Visit to the Studio of Madame Lallie Charles', p. 540.

³⁶ 'Madame Lallie Charles's Portraits', p. 39.

girls returned, sitting to her for portraits that marked their passage into marriage and motherhood. In 1907 *The Girl's Realm* published a feature on Charles's practice titled 'A Photographer of Beautiful Girlhood' which focused on her 'special interest' in this area of portraiture. The author, Marion Leslie, commented that Charles's 'girl studies of various attitudes show how graceful even a young schoolgirl may be taught to be; awkwardness seems to vanish before her magic touch'.³⁷

One of the young women who featured in the article was fifteen-year-old Diana Manners, the youngest daughter of the Duke and Duchess of Rutland. Charles had also photographed her mother, who is referred to in the article [Fig. 48]. In one of the portraits of Diana Manners, Charles posed her seated in a Chippendale-style, ornate chair, gazing upwards wearing a white pleated smock dress with a high, squarish neckline and lace panel across the top [Fig. 49]. The author comments on Manners's 'girlish simplicity' in the portrait and her knack for 'artistic posing' like her mother, establishing a pedigree of refined femininity.³⁸ Adolescence is typically an awkward and often frustrating stage of life, but Charles romanticises and aestheticises it in her portrait of Manners. A sulky eye roll becomes a look of longing in front of Charles's lens as Manners appears to daydream of her future (and perhaps finding true love), wistfully poised on the cusp of womanhood, pouting prettily. Diana Manners became a much photographed and celebrated 'beauty' as an adult and in this portrait of her while still a child we see how Charles paved the way for her ascent to stardom, depicting her as a perfect romantic heroine. Manners's next visit to Charles's studio was three years later, aged eighteen, with her elder sisters Marjorie and Violet [Fig. 50], after having 'putting up her hair': the Victorian ritual of passing from girlhood to womanhood. Charles posed the sisters artistically, wearing Grecian-inspired gowns and hairstyles, the styling and posing evoking the three graces of classical mythology, a concept I will return to in section three.

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³⁷ Leslie, 'A Photographer of Beautiful Girlhood: A Visit to the Studio of Madame Lallie Charles', p. 543.



Figure 48: Duchess of Rutland by Lallie Charles, published in The Tatler, 1907.



Figure 49: Diana Manners by Lallie Charles, published in The Girl's Realm, 1907.



Figure 50: Diana, Marjorie and Violet Manners by Lallie Charles, published in The Tatler, 1910.

When a young woman from the aristocracy reached age seventeen or eighteen, she would 'come out' to society as a debutante, signalling her availability for marriage. The ceremony that marked this transition from girlhood to womanhood was a presentation at court by her mother or other female relative, when she would be paraded in front of the monarch in the official Drawing Rooms wearing a white dress to symbolise her purity. Other parts of this ritual were the 'putting up' of hair, the lengthening of skirts and being taught how to behave as a lady. Until this point in her life, an upper-class girl was kept at home, but after her presentation at court she was exhibited at Society events in order to attract a suitable husband, ideally during her first 'season'. The social debut was an upper-class ritual that indicated a young woman's sexual maturity and all of the activities it demanded were organised around displaying her to men: she became a public spectacle. Calls would be paid, balls and

³⁹ Pamela Horn, *Ladies of the Manor: Wives and Daughters in Country-House Society 1830 – 1918* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1991), pp. 52–55.

dinners hosted, country houses visited – all to expose the debutante to as wide a circle as possible and attract the most eligible bachelors. She would be strictly chaperoned during these events but would be expected to make an impression.

Photography, and portraiture in particular, played a key role in this rite of passage. Leslie wrote in her article on Charles about this transition in young, upper-class women's lives: 'they emerge from the schoolroom, like a butterfly from the chrysalis, with gossamer wings out spread for presentation [...] the coming debutantes are hurried off to a photographer, that the first flush of their youthful charm may be preserved'. And Making portraits of debutantes was, therefore, a lucrative business for photographers. As we saw in chapter three, Kate Pragnell & Co. were the resident photographers of debutantes for *Hearth and Home* magazine and produced portraits of hundreds of young women in their 'coming out' dresses after they had been presented at court. But rather than producing fairly uniform photographs of debutantes in their gowns as Pragnell and Stewart did for *Hearth and Home*, Charles made 'studies' that were reproduced in *The Tatler*'s 'A Beautiful Débutante' feature.

The documentation and thus preservation of the bloom of youth was an important function of the debutante portrait, but to be photographed by Charles, and then put on the front page of *The Tatler* and declared one of the most 'interesting' or 'beautiful' debutantes of the season, as the woman in figure 51 was, was a certified way of attracting attention. In this portrait Pamela Fitzgerald is wide eyed, suggesting her availability and conveying a sense of innocent longing. The sitter coyly cocks her head toward her shoulder, looking languorous, unadorned apart from a sensuous sheer drapery. While the only flesh we see in this portrait is above the décolletage and therefore the photograph does not transgress any codes of modesty, it has been cleverly cropped to suggest that the sitter wears nothing but the fabric. The drapery and composition focus the spectator's attention on the touch of Fitzgerald's cheek to her bare shoulder, producing a decidedly erotic quality. Charles has expertly distilled the intense moment of desirability – balanced with markers of purity and modesty – that would characterise this moment of a young upper-class woman's life.

⁴⁰ Leslie, 'A Photographer of Beautiful Girlhood: A Visit to the Studio of Madame Lallie Charles'.



Figure 51: Pamela Fitzgerald by Lallie Charles, published in The Tatler, 1914.

The period of a young woman's 'coming out' came to a close when she became engaged and *The Girl's Realm* article mentioned above also explores the phenomenon of engagement portraits, an area where Charles also excelled. Of all the types of portraits that Charles made of women, the engagement portrait was the one most explicitly constructed for a male gaze. This would be taken for the fiancé and, as Leslie reports, 'Madame Charles never fails to rise to the importance of the occasion and is at great pains to arrive at the pose which it is considered "he" will admire most'. ⁴¹ Charles directed her sitter into attitudes that a fiancé would find appealing, conjuring this male gaze. The bride-to-be would perform her desirability and virtue during a sitting with Charles, as Leslie explains by quoting a line from Tennyson's famous poem 'In Memoriam': 'And thinking this will please him best/She takes a riband or a rose'. ⁴²

⁴¹ Leslie, 'A Photographer of Beautiful Girlhood: A Visit to the Studio of Madame Lallie Charles', p. 542.

⁴² Ibid.

During the sitting the woman was presenting herself based on her knowledge of her future husband's desires and preferences (as well as her own fantasies), and Charles was her collaborator, bringing her expertise in feminine allure to bear on the portrait's composition.

Leslie then describes the sequence of events that occurred after the engagement portrait sitting:

After a sitting of this interesting character, Madame's telephone is kept busy with enquiries as to when the proofs will be ready, because 'he is so anxious to see them'. The other day came a soft pleading voice through the telephone, of a pretty American girl who had just become engaged. She had sat to Madame Charles before, but had a new photograph taken for her fiancé, of which she was most anxious to get the 'proofs.' 'Do let me have them,' she pleaded; 'before it did not matter, but *now* it is Romance!'⁴³

That the 'American girl' made the decision to return to Charles for a portrait expressly for her fiancé shows she was impressed with the results of the previous session. When it came to having portraits made for a gift for her fiancé – an important part of Edwardian conjugal rituals – she knew she would be made to look desirable by Charles. The portrait as an object was not only part of the rites of 'romance', but romance was also a potent element of the aesthetic that Charles was selling. These young women wanted to instil feelings of passion and love in their husband-to-be when he looked at their portrait. Although the fiancé was the intended audience for such an image, in many cases it would be reproduced to a much larger group of spectators via the illustrated press. The section of the media dedicated to celebrity gossip reported regularly on aristocratic engagements and a recent portrait was required to illustrate news in this category.

Like the American girl, Marjorie Manners – the eldest of the Manners sisters – was a returning customer of Charles's. On the occasion of her engagement in 1912 her portrait was published in *The Tatler* [Fig. 52] alongside a smaller portrait of her fiancé

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⁴³ Ibid. Original emphasis.

(a common design). In this portrait Manners's soft gaze conveys her virtue and the image is suffused with romance, as she seems to be lost in thoughts of her betrothed. For a woman of the upper class such as Marjorie Manners, the events of her life were witnessed and discussed very publicly through this strand of the press. Manners had been photographed by Charles several times over the course of a decade when the photographer's career was at its zenith. In 1902, aged twenty, Manners's portrait appeared on the front page of *The Tatler*, and inside the magazine in 1904. With regularity every few years a Society magazine published a full-page portrait of Manners by Charles.⁴⁴



Figure 52: Marjorie Manners by Lallie Charles, published in The Tatler, 1912.

Knowing that as notable members of the aristocracy their lives were made public in the press, the women of the Manners family chose Charles as the photographer who

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⁴⁴The Tatler, 17 September 1902, p. 480.; front cover *The Bystander*, 20 January 1904.; front cover *The Tatler*, 15 August 1906.; front cover *The Bystander*, 1 December 1909.

could fashion their public identities and shore up their reputations, presenting them as arbiters of taste, models of elegance and paragons of virtue. Their surname, of course, provided ample opportunities for journalistic puns on their feminine charms and newspapers like *The Tatler* celebrated their 'Beautiful Manners'.⁴⁵

In this section we have seen that Charles gained the loyalty of aristocratic women, establishing herself as the architect of the various feminine incarnations that an upper-class woman would move through over the course of a lifetime. From the adolescent who shed her chrysalis of 'girlish simplicity' [Fig. 49], to the alluring debutante in search of a husband [Fig. 51], to the maternal grace of middle age [Fig. 48], women kept returning to face Charles's camera as part of their social rituals and to construct their class and gender identities. The photographer then sold the rights to their portraits to the leading newspaper-magazines of the period, fuelling the public desire for feminine spectacle and the dramatisation of an elite lifestyle. ⁴⁶ The wistful expressions of romantic and sentimental longing written onto the bodies of Charles's loyal customers became those of the female readers consuming their images in magazines, who then, if they could afford Charles's substantial fees, found themselves in her reception rooms, waiting to be called in to receive her special treatment. The particularities of this treatment are the subject of the next section.

The Lallie Charles treatment

Charles synthesised many skills in her practice of portraiture, which led to her reputation as a beautician-*cum*-physician-*cum*-stylist. She was highly literate in the feminine etiquette required of 'ladies' and the body language that signalled upper class virtues. Charles knew how to *display* the female body to its advantage and how to utilise pose and expression to communicate different tones, all within the range of

⁴⁵ The Tatler, 19 January 1910, p. 67.

⁴⁶ As the illustrated media proliferated in this period image reproduction fees replaced sitter fees as the dominant economic model of commercial photography. Photographers granted free sittings to high status individuals and celebrities seeking publicity in order to sell their image to magazines and newspapers. Tim Padfield, 'Joseph John Elliott and Clarence Edmund Fry', ed. by John Hannavy, *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 479–80. See also Terence Pepper, *High Society: Photographs 1897 - 1914* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1998), p. 80.

sensuality, romance, innocence and sentiment. As explained in chapter two, Charles exerted a great deal of time interviewing her sitters and putting them at ease, intuiting their desires, vulnerabilities and idiosyncrasies so that the sitting itself was a pleasurable experience. The personal information that Charles gained within this informal meeting was then integrated with the repository of poses, props and aesthetic choices that constituted her distinctive style. The result was a bespoke image that responded to the individual features and mannerisms of each sitter while lifting them into an archetype of rarefied womanliness.

Like many women of high social status, Diana Manners and her sisters saw a visit to the studio of Lallie Charles as akin to an appointment at a beauty parlour.⁴⁷ Cecil Beaton, one of the most celebrated photographers of the twentieth century whose career choice was inspired by an encounter with Charles's photographs (and a sitting with Charles herself) as a child, theorised that she took the place of Alice Hughes as the most fashionable photographer in London because '[w]omen went to Miss Charles not so much to have their likenesses reproduced, but as if to a beauty parlour to be made young and lovely [...] no one was disappointed'.48 There is a stark distinction made here between the regular portrait – functional, faithful – and the kind of elaborate, individualised service that Lallie Charles offered to her customers. Charles evidently had a much more bespoke approach than other commercial photographers, as did her sister Rita Martin: according to Beaton, sitters were 'willing to do their bidding, for they knew that they were being beautified'. 49 In 1899 an article published in The Ladies Field about Charles made reference to her examination of sitter's features in order to produce the most attractive result. Anne Morton Lane, the author of the piece, wrote that '[p]hysiognomy Madame Garet-Charles has evidently made her close and careful study. Like a physician, she diagnoses each "case" that is brought before her, and her "treatment", nine times out of ten, appears to be entirely successful'. 50 The lexicon that Morton Lane uses is that of science and the medical profession: she likens Charles to a 'physician' and suggests that the photographer

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⁴⁷ Cecil Beaton and Gail Buckland, *The Magic Image: The Genius of Photography from 1839 to the Present Day* (Toronto: Little, Brown and Co, 1975), p. 271.

⁴⁸ Beaton, *British Photographers*, p. 32.

⁴⁹ Beaton and Buckland, p. 271.

⁵⁰ Morton Lane, pp. 48–49.

approached her subjects as patients bought into her care. In her studio Charles would anatomise her subjects' features and remedy any features found wanting of charm or beauty to transform them into an idealised version of themselves.

Charles's first studio, 'The Nook', was opposite the studio of the artist Harry Furniss, best known for his illustrations to Lewis Carroll's Sylvie and Bruno (1889), and the two were well acquainted. Furniss included an account of the photographer in his book Some Victorian Women (1923) that offers insight into the pervasive appeal of the Lallie Charles 'treatment'. He recollected that 'in the nineties the majority of Society beauties flocked to [Charles's] studio, perhaps by way of antidote to the too realistic portraits of that unflattering, but equally clever artist, Mr Sargent, the ladies' portrait painter'. 51 Furniss refers here to the American-born artist John Singer Sargent, a contemporary of Charles and the most fashionable portrait painter of the late nineteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic.⁵² Sargent's work is characterised by a naturalistic style that captured the sitter's mannerisms and idiosyncrasies. With their impressionistic brushwork, his portraits provided an authentic 'essence' of the sitter, but as Furniss observed, this talent may have had limited appeal to women who were increasingly inclined to artifice over naturalism as the cultural values of the era pulled in this direction.⁵³ It is curious that the camera, with its associations of unforgiving 'objectivity' and indexicality, may have been preferable to the interpretative medium of paint for producing an idealised portrait, yet Charles's photographic style, as we have already seen, was far from realistic. Charles balanced the camera's unforgiving quality with her practice of generously retouching of negatives. When asked about her 'faculty of using the brush' she said,

I like to show the face as it appears when it is looking its best, to soften the lines, to take away an ugly pout from the lips, to make a thin neck look plump and round, to give a soft expression to a staring pair of eyes. The camera

⁵¹ Harry Furniss, Some Victorian Women: Good, Bad and Indifferent (London: John Lane, 1923), p. 94.

⁵² Richard Ormond, *Sargent, John Singer* (Oxford University Press, 2003)

< https://www.oxfordartonline.com/groveart/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7000076043>.

⁵³ Artificiality pervaded art, literature and fashion of the late 1800s. Cheryl Buckley and Hilary Fawcett, *Fashioning the Feminine : Representation and Women's Fashion From the Fin De Siècle to the Present* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), p. 26.

accentuates any little fault, and this must be remedied even if we may err a little the other way. No one says no to a flattering yet lifelike portrait.⁵⁴

Charles's embrace of artifice, albeit coded within the language of naturalism, is important because at the close of the nineteenth century a paradoxically stylised, artificial naturalism dictated women's fashions and feminine culture more broadly. Fashions and designs of the Edwardian era featured feathers, exotic flowers and fruits that presented an 'idea of Britain as a cornucopia of the riches of the empire'. Charles's portraits tapped into this cultural mood of opulence and sensuality, contributing to what Max Beerbohm referred to as 'a new epoch of artifice'.

Between 1890 and 1910 the discourse on femininity shifted away from an emphasis on women's inner spiritual beauty and virtue, towards beauty displayed externally. References to 'personal magnetism', 'fascination' and 'charm' evoked the erotic element of feminine beauty and suggested physical attraction. Edwardian fashion writers such as Mrs. Eric Pritchard philosophised that an interest in one's appearance was a 'new religion' for women — a 'cult' of 'personal beauty' that equipped women with a power over men. Charles stated publicly her belief that there was no such thing as an ugly woman, and that every woman had some redeeming feature—a statement that was surely a very persuasive advertisement for her business. Beyond the tricks that Charles employed in the photographic studio, the notion that appearances could be improved and features corrected was the ideology behind the burgeoning global beauty industry. In Britain, Selfridges established its beauty counter in 1908 and in the same year Helena Rubinstein, the great entrepreneur of cosmetics and beauty treatments, opened her second salon just

⁵⁴ McDonald, p. 439. *Leeds Mercury* reported in 1919: 'Some "don't's" for women sitters, once given by the late Mme. Lallie Charles, the Society and theatrical photographer, included: - Don't "make up"

the late Mme. Lallie Charles, the Society and theatrical photographer, included: - Don't "make up" beforehand. Don't have your hair specially dressed for the occasion by a hairdresser. Don't wear a brand-new frock) the simpler the dress the better'. *Leeds Mercury*, 10 April 1919, p. 5.

55 S G, *The Art of Being Beautiful: A Series of Interviews with a Society Beauty* (London: Henry J. Drane,

^{1903). &}lt;sup>56</sup> Cheryl Buckley and Hilary Fawcett, p. 25.

⁵⁷ Max Beerbohm, *The Yellow Book*, April 1894. cited in Neville Williams, *Powder and Paint: A History of the Englishwoman's Toilet, Elizabeth I-Elizabeth II* (London: Longmans Green, 1957), pp. 166–67.

⁵⁸ Steele, pp. 213–14.

⁵⁹ Mrs. Eric Pritchard, *The Cult of Chiffon* (London: Grant Richards, 1902), pp. 5–6.

⁶⁰ Grev, p. 204.

a stone's throw from Charles's Mayfair studio. The photographer became one of 'Madame' Rubinstein's patrons, and Charles's own view was echoed in the beautician's famous quip that 'there is no such thing as an ugly woman, only a lazy one'. 61 While one Mayfair 'Madame' improved women's complexions with tinctures and tonics the other took her brush to their negatives, both women striving to achieve feminine perfection in their respective professions.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Charles handled her subjects with the same level of intimacy as a beautician like Madame Rubinstein. Several comparisons can be made between the service Charles was providing and those offered by beauty parlours in terms of the attention and care given to the bodies and appearance of women. In Charles's studio men did not enter the premises to allow women to move freely between rooms in various states of undress as Charles worked their hair, bathed their eyes and draped them in soft fabrics. 62 The photographer combined an element of styling into her practice. She referred to herself as having the skillset of a dressmaker and a milliner, the two most common entrepreneurial ventures for women in this period, as well as a photographer. 63 There was no negotiation with sitters regarding their costume as Charles explained: 'I insist on my right to everything exactly as I wish'.64 'I like to dress my sitters according to my fancy,' she told an interviewer in 1899, going on to detail the type of appearance she would construct:

In the matter of costume I am adamant. I must have something soft and artistic as a frame to the face, and often I have to completely dress my sitters, arrange their hair for them, twist a fleecy scarf or fichu round their shoulders, and turn them from fashion plates into simple, graceful women.⁶⁵

The paradoxically highly wrought construct of a 'simple, graceful wom[a]n' was one of Charles's specialisms. She explicitly stated the process of transformation that she

⁶¹ Yevonde, p. 73. Clark.

⁶² Leslie, 'A Photographer of Beautiful Girlhood: A Visit to the Studio of Madame Lallie Charles', p. 539.

⁶³ 'Photography as a Profession for Women: A Chat with Madame Garet-Charles', p. 416.

⁶⁵ McDonald, p. 438.

facilitated in her studio: a well-to-do woman would arrive wearing the latest fashions and Charles would pare back these garments, often to a minimum, to emphasise the pose and certain unique, attractive features. In fashion plates the models were identical, vehicles for the display of clothing, but Charles's photographic process was tailored to the idiosyncrasies of each sitter's appearance, even if it was rendered through an ideal, essentialised form of womanhood.

Charles's portrait of the actress Claire Rickards is a striking example of what *The Ladies Field* referred to as the Lallie Charles 'treatment' – the distinctive way in which she arranged and styled her sitters. In this portrait, published in 1907 [fig. 53], the actress is photographed with a 'soft and artistic frame to the face' by way of a translucent veil trailing from her head and a pale silky scarf draped about her neck. She is posed as if in a reverie; her head is tilted, stretching her neck, and her gaze is up and to the side. The neckline of Rickards' dress is slightly scalloped and arranged to expose the delicate chest area and she wears a soft 'Gibson Girl' hairstyle with pearly earrings. All these elements combine to create a romantic image of glamour and desirability that transports the subject out of her own time. She is not wearing the latest fashions, which would date quickly in a portrait, but instead is put in Charles's 'soft and artistic' costume and coded as a classical beauty, a theme that we will return to later.



Figure 53: Claire Rickards by Lallie Charles, published in The Tatler, 1907.



Figure 54: Claire Rickards by Dover Street Studios, published in The Tatler, 1906.



Figure 55: Claire Rickards by Lallie Charles, published in The Bystander, 1907.

Charles's skill in styling and posing her sitters becomes unambiguously apparent if we compare her portrait of Rickards to one taken by (male-run) Dover Street Studios and published five months earlier [fig. 54]. In Dover Street Studio's portrait the actress appears to have an undefined jawline and stocky neck; her collarbones are not visible, and she slouches, sinking into the chair. The effect of the pose on her figure is unflattering. Directed by Charles, Rickards' shoulders are pulled down and forwards slightly and so her frame looks narrower and daintier. She is positioned at an angle to the camera so that one side of her body recedes into space and therefore appears slimmer. Fabrics have been carefully arranged to disguise and accentuate certain features: shadows created by the scarf give the illusion of a hollow at the base of the neck to suggest more prominent collarbones. Rickards's neck is elongated it as it rises from the drapery and tilts to the side. Charles's placement of lighting is also more subtle and skilful than in Dover Street's portrait, so it sculpts the actress's jaw and sharpens her bone structure. In the Dover Street portrait Rickards has been given a dark shawl to cover her shoulders, which serves only to make her body look wider than it is. Charles, by contrast, uses pale colours and fashionable sheer fabrics to create a weightless, ephemeral aesthetic that fades at the bottom of the portrait with the help of retouching. Rickards becomes a beautiful feminine vision – soft, light and

ephemeral. As figure 55 shows, Charles employed this direction of the actress's pose more than once, with similarly effective results.

Charles stated publicly that an understanding of women's dress, drawn from her own lived experience as a woman, gave her an advantage in the work of portraiture. In 1912 she told the *Daily Mail* that

In spite, too, of the fact that one or two famous men have been great authorities on the subject of women's dress, women undoubtedly understand how women should sit and stand, and how their dress should lie, better than men do.⁶⁶

Here, Charles makes reference to the tacit knowledge of feminine comportment and etiquette that formed an integral part of middle- and upper-class women's socialisation. Yet the photographer had a more professionalised understanding of this subject than she revealed in the interview. Charles had in fact begun her career producing photographic illustrations for articles on etiquette and body language for women's periodicals, using her sisters Rita and Isabella as her models.⁶⁷ She was, therefore, accustomed to constructing postures and expressions that projected certain message or idea in the realm of representation. Charles frequently 'draped and posed [models] in an artistic way to make pretty pictures'; she knew, therefore, how to direct a sitter and how to bring an element of theatricality to her photographs.⁶⁸

In 1902 a feature titled 'How our partners hold us' was published in *The Lady's Magazine*, illustrated with photographs by Charles.⁶⁹ It explores types of male dancer that a woman might encounter in the ballroom and how they perform as dance partners. The photographs depict a couple engaged in different dances and stages of the evening: the man proffering his arm to invite the woman to dance; the couple engaged in a number of well-known dances; the male partner helping his partner into her coat at the evening's close. Awkward and clumsy movements are contrasted with

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⁶⁶ 'Why Women Are Good Photographers: Making the Sitting a Pleasure'.

⁶⁷ 'How Our Partners Hold Us', *The Lady's Magazine*, 1902, 60–64.;'The Language of the Fan', *The Lady's Magazine*. 1901, 533–37.

⁶⁸ Leslie, 'A Photographer of Beautiful Girlhood: A Visit to the Studio of Madame Lallie Charles', p. 539.

⁶⁹ 'How Our Partners Hold Us'.

harmonious and graceful ones [Figs 56 – 57]. This series shows that Charles was alert to the nuances of mannerism and well-versed in the best ways to remove clumsiness or stiffness and capture a pose in which the subject looked natural and at ease. Through her experience in this type of sequential and narrative image making, Charles would have developed a keen awareness of how to communicate an emotion, convey a state of mind or hint towards a story with the subtlest shifts in body language. This theatrical component – referred to by journalists as 'Madame Charles's skill in dramatic representation' – is part of what made her studio portraits so compelling.⁷⁰



Figure 56: Illustration for 'How our partners hold us' by Lallie Charles, The Lady's Magazine, 1901.

⁷⁰ Leslie, 'A Photographer of Beautiful Girlhood: A Visit to the Studio of Madame Lallie Charles', p. 540.



Figure 57: Illustration for 'How our partners hold us' by Lallie Charles, The Lady's Magazine, 1901.

Charles's skills in 'dramatic representation' are also in evidence in a 1901 feature for The Lady's Magazine titled 'The Language of the Fan', which sought to revive the eighteenth-century tradition of using a fan to communicate one's desires. The article suggested a variety of 'flutters' to assist women in the art of seduction and while it encouraged them to communicate 'demurely' it also promised that 'the mischief a really coquettish woman can do with her fan is simply incredible! Her tactics would cause a Napoleon to blush with shame!'71 In this series, the fan is a prop in an erotic gestural language. The model (Rita Martin) is shown adopting playful and flirtatious attitudes: she frames her face with the fan [Fig. 58], peeks out from behind it [Fig. 59], tilts her chin down to rest on the fan and looks up through her eyelashes flirtatiously [Fig. 60]. Charles's photographs of her sister posing in various attitudes with a selection of fans demonstrate how to communicate suggestive messages such as 'kiss me', 'do you love me?', 'yes', and 'follow me'. One illustration shows the model intently gazing out from behind the fan that obscured the bottom half of her face, a gesture of modesty that also suggests complicity, aptly titled 'you are a flirt' [Fig. 59]. In another illustration the model places a finger to her lips to warn that someone is

⁷¹ 'The Language of the Fan'.

watching the lovers' exchange. The effect of these gestures and poses is a heightened erotic focus on the model's face, neck and hands.



Figure 58: Illustrations by Lallie Charles for The Language of the Fan', The Lady's Magazine, 1902.



Figure 59: Illustrations by Lallie Charles for The Language of the Fan', The Lady's Magazine, 1902.



Figure 60: Illustrations by Lallie Charles for The Language of the Fan', The Lady's Magazine, 1902.

Instructing women into seductive – but still respectable – poses was thus a skill that Charles had finessed in her illustrative work for magazines and books, and this carried into her representation of Society ladies. Within her unique photographic language, hands were often a focal point of the portrait; they worked alongside facial expressions to communicate a certain tone or message about the subject – her elegance and refinement, for instance. During the 'golden age' of studio portraiture, women's hands were a focus of attention generally, as evidenced by Cecil Beaton's illustrations dedicated to the subject in his *Book of Beauty* discussed in the thesis introduction [Fig. 61]. In this sketch, feminine hands are disembodied, engaged in a variety of (in)activity and an undeniable fetishism attends to this isolation and erotic fixation on a body part. Charles's portrait of Mrs. Farquharson provides a striking example of how hands were used expressively: the sitter's hands are conspicuously displayed, bought to the cheekbones with the thumb lightly brushing the jaw; the digits of the other hand lightly pressed into the palm [Fig. 62].



Figure 61: 'Pre-War Hands' illustration by Cecil Beaton, The Book of Beauty, 1930.



Figure 62: Mrs Farquharson of Invercauld by Lallie Charles, published in The Bystander, 1909.

In this section we have seen how Charles made a science of representing the feminine body, a fact that was observed by her contemporaries who compared her technique to a 'physician'.⁷² Just as a physician intimately examines the body of their patient and builds trust in order to diagnose ailments, Charles applied subtle scrutiny, cultivated proximity and gained the submission of her customers. Her diagnoses were

⁷² Morton Lane, pp. 48–49.

aesthetic rather than medical: she could correct a poor posture, a slack jaw or an ungainly nose as expertly as she could soften angles and reduce a waist. The photographer knew how to use artifice and illusion to 'treat' the bodies of her sitters, as we saw in her portraits of Claire Rickards. Through her early work making illustrations for didactic periodical articles for women, Charles developed a proficiency in producing different affects through pose and expression. In the next section I examine the specific affects that Charles specialised in creating and I theorise her sources and inspiration for them within art historical and photographic traditions. Within this discussion I also consider why the aesthetic coding of Charles's portraits was so seductive for Society women at this historical moment.

Aesthetics and Affects

Lallie Charles was extremely commercially successful because she constructed an instantly recognisable, 'signature' aesthetic while also tailoring her portraits to the individual. As we saw in the previous section, she read faces and the personalities mapped onto them as if practicing 'physiognomy' and adapted her 'treatment' accordingly.⁷³ On a first glance her portraits may seem formulaic, but a deeper analysis reveals that Charles in fact utilised a diverse range of poses and compositions in her portraits, always ensuring that each sitter received personalised attention and appeared as idealised version of themselves, much like the results offered by Snapchat and Instagram filters today.

In this final section I employ an art historical lens to unpick the visual codes and vocabularies within Charles's portraits and theorise their provenance to show the level of sophistication and complexity in her work. I argue that Charles was drawing on a range of iconographic and historical references in order to elevate her subjects to an advanced plane of womanhood. The type of idealised aristocratic femininity that Charles constructed then became the collective fantasy of women flipping through the pages of magazines such as *The Tatler* and *The Sketch*. Inspired by what they saw, they

⁷³ Ibid.

came to her studio seeking transformation from her 'magic touch'.74

To understand the development of Charles's style and its appeal we must go back to the beginning, before her reputation as a portraitist was established in the late 1890s. In addition to her didactic illustrations for magazine articles discussed above, Charles also produced photographic 'fancy pictures' for periodicals using her sisters as models. This work was explicitly discussed at the time as 'artistic' photography, but Charles's motivation was also commercially oriented as she was making money from them and trying to develop her reputation as a portrait photographer.⁷⁵ It is my contention that the legacy of Charles's 'fancy pictures' can be observed in her portraits of society ladies, but it is the *affects* belonging to this genre that I pay particular attention to in this section in relation to the shifting structure of British society as the twentieth century dawned.

Before I consider some examples, it is important to define the 'fancy picture'. The term was coined in the eighteenth century to mean paintings of everyday life that incorporated a narrative element. A fancy picture typically featured young women (often 'maids') or children in a countryside scene, presenting a bucolic idyll with a distinctly sentimental character. The aim of this genre was to entertain and stimulate a particular 'sensibility' in the viewer, such as pity or amusement. As David Mannings notes, fancy pictures are characterised by a 'contrived innocence' and in some cases display 'erotic overtones'. Francis Hayman's *Milkmaid's Garland* (1741-2), Thomas Gainsborough's *The Housemaid* (circa 1782-6) and Philip Mercier's *A Girl Holding a Cat* (circa 1750) [Fig. 63] are quintessential fancy pictures. In these sentimental genre paintings, the everyday rituals and tasks of young women become spectacle: girls dance gaily on Mayday, one is prettily and pensively engaged in domestic chores and

⁷⁴ Marion Leslie, 'A Photographer of Beautiful Girlhood: A Visit to the Studio of Madame Lallie Charles's, *The Girl's Realm*, May 1907, 537–43.

⁷⁵ 'Madame Lallie Charles attributes her success in a very large measure to the Press. When first of all she entertained the idea of making photography a profession, she took several "studies" she had done round to various papers and magazines'. 'Madame Lallie Charles's Portraits', pp. 39–40.

⁷⁶ David Mannings, *Fancy Picture* (Oxford University Press, 2003)

https://www.oxfordartonline.com/groveart/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7000027491.

⁷⁷ Hugh Belsey, *Gainsborough, Thomas* (Oxford University Press, 2017) https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-10282.

⁷⁸ Mannings.

another, with a perfectly heart-shaped face, frilly mop cap and a conspicuously full bosom, fusses over a pet cat. The erotic overtone in Mercier's painting is unmistakable.



Figure 63: Philip Mercier, A Girl Holding a Cat, circa 1750, oil on canvas, 91.40 x 70.50 cm, National Galleries Scotland.

Charles's 'fancy pictures' began to appear in the popular press from 1899. The photographs featured women and children and were given allegorical titles that signalled their status as poetic ruminations on an abstract theme or concept. For example, in a photograph titled *Reflections*, published in *The Penny Pictorial* magazine in 1899 [Fig. 64] a woman sits side on to the camera in fashionable dress; one hand lies open with palm upward in her lap and the other clutches a posy of flowers that rest on her throat and collarbone as she gazes into the distance, her chin slightly tilted upwards as if she is contemplating a higher realm. It is possible to observe several instances of this pose and tonal register in Charles's later portrait work [Figs. 65 – 66]. The portraits, produced nine years after the fancy pictures, share their romantic quality. In figures 65 and 66 the women are seated in a very similar position wearing

glamorous gowns like the woman in *Reflections*. The Marchioness of Downshire looks up from contemplating a book and Princess Patricia looks down slightly; both appear to be lost in thought or perhaps absorbed in *reflections*.



Figure 64: 'Reflections' by Lallie Charles, published in The Penny Pictorial, 1899.

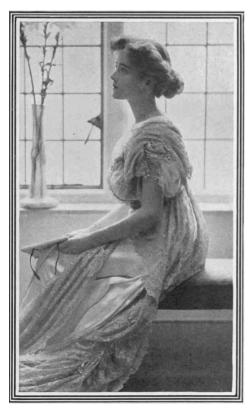


Figure 65: Marchioness of Downshire by Lallie Charles, published in The Tatler, 1908.



Figure 66: Princess Patricia of Connaught by Lallie Charles, circa 1908, published by J. Beagles & Co, 139 mm x 88 mm, National Portrait Gallery, London.

Many of Charles's 'fancy' studies have a bucolic theme.⁷⁹ Sweet Maidenhood [Fig. 67] shows a young woman, perhaps the same model as the previous two photographs, fashioned in a clinging white fabric as a kind of crude dress. The model's arms, neck and chest are exposed but she clasps her hands to her breast in a pious gesture, with eyes raised upwards. She leans against a makeshift wall adorned with a wreath of flowers, which hints at a rural scene. There is an overt eroticism here, evoked by the girl's tumbling hair and exposed flesh, yet the title, Sweet Maidenhood, insists on her 'sweet' virtuousness. The state of undress is justified by an appeal to a rustic, or even rugged, simplicity.



Figure 67: 'Sweet Maidenhood' by Lallie Charles, published in The Royal Magazine 1899.

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⁷⁹ For example *Poppies, Sweet as the rose in her bosom!, Sweet Maidenhood* and *In the Orchard*. See Grey.



Figure 68: 'In the Orchard' by Lallie Charles, published in The Royal Magazine 1899.

Similarly, *In the Orchard* [Fig. 68] exploits the mythology of wholesome country pastimes and voluptuous fecundy, to display young women's bodies and pose them suggestively. In this photograph one young woman reaches her arms overhead to grasp a branch, displaying her figure with hitched up skirts. Her legs are set apart and her companion is nestled between them lower down on the ladder, ready to receive the harvest in her basket. The connotations of ripe fruit in this image are far from subtle.

Charles's experience of working within the conventions of the fancy picture enabled her to become adept in balancing modesty and sentimentality (that pleased the sensibilities of the time) with playfulness and sensuality (that produced erotic appeal), skilfully exploiting a tension that defined the feminine ideal in the Edwardian era. ⁸⁰ This carefully adjusted chemistry made Charles's photographic style intensely desirable: her portraits of women had an elusive seductive quality that appealed to Edwardian romanticism while also declaring their virtue, conforming to late-

⁸⁰ Fashion of the period – particularly the designs of Maison Lucile – also played with this tension between modesty and allure. Cheryl Buckley and Hilary Fawcett, p. 20.

nineteenth and early-twentieth-century social, cultural and class-based codes of feminine respectability.

As demand for her portraits accelerated, Charles carried over the pastoralism of her fancy pictures, incorporating organic props until it became one of her trademarks. Charles made a 'speciality of floral arrangement', using a mixture of artificial and fresh flowers in her compositions. She sometimes used flowers to frame her sitters or had them interact with arrangements. For example, to return to Charles's loyal sitter Marjorie Manners, in figure 69 she is depicted gazing, wide-eyed, into the camera wearing a shawl and clutching an armful of flowers with a freshness as if she has just been out gathering them, draped loosely in a sheer fabric. Charles portrays her as the quintessential English rose.



Figure 69: Marjorie Manners by Lallie Charles, published in The Bystander, 1904.

⁸¹ Leslie, 'A Photographer of Beautiful Girlhood: A Visit to the Studio of Madame Lallie Charles', p. 540. The inclusion of flowers in Charles' portraits also served a symbolic purpose. Floriography - the coded language of flowers - was revived in the Victorian period and became embedded within predominantly feminine popular culture. Within Charles's portraits, flowers were therefore employed to convey a message about the sitter, as well as evoking a sense of whimsy and sentimentalism. See Edmund Evans, *The Illuminated Language of Flowers, Illustrated by Kate Greenaway* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1884).

Through their pastoralism Charles's fancy studies were suffused with a distinctly nostalgic affect: rural life and identities were preserved and romanticised; old English traditions were celebrated. The portraits Charles produced later in her career serve an entirely different purpose to the early costume studies, yet they appeal to the viewer by triggering the same sentiments as the fancy pictures through the props, expressions and posing. Nostalgia for an England in the 'age of innocence' was encoded into Charles's portraits and, as we shall see, this was part of what gave her work such irresistible appeal to the women of the landed gentry.

At the turn of the twentieth century British society was undergoing a monumental transformation. Modernity was encroaching, a class system of social deference to the aristocracy was giving way to democracy and accelerating consumerism was enabling social mobility. From the time of the Third Great Reform Act in 1884 – 5 the landed class began to lose its foothold in Britain.⁸² Urbanisation and industrialisation were eviscerating Britain's historically agricultural economy, leading to shrinking land rentals and plummeting land prices.⁸³ The possession of land was no longer a secure source of wealth and power. Furthermore, the Reform Act saw an expansion of the franchise to working class men; for the first time the majority of the male population were able to vote. In the words of historian David Cannadine, '[t]he age of the masses had superseded the age of the classes'.⁸⁴ Over the next thirty years the balance of power continued to shift toward the middle and working classes progressively weakening the security of the aristocracy.

Another major issue for the British aristocracy was the phenomenon of wealthy Americans 'buying' their way in and 'diluting' London high society. Young men from the aristocracy were being encouraged to marry American heiresses to save their families from destitution. In the early years of the 1900's *The Tatler* frequently reported on the 'American invasion'. 85 In November 1904 the magazine published an anonymously-written poem titled 'Pity the Poor Peer', which commented on the 'American invasion of society and the decline in the value of land' that was causing

⁸² David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 39–40.

⁸³ Cannadine, The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy, p. 26.

⁸⁴ Ihid

⁸⁵ Cannadine, The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy, p. 28.

'some of the oldest families' struggling to 'keep their heads above water'. ⁸⁶ The author laments the fact that 'Our noblest and our best despair/ of vying with that shining light,/ The Yankee millionaire'. It blames the falling price of land explicitly: 'Broad acres yield but little gold,/ And noble houses still decay;/ Their state is growing, we are told,/More parlous day by day'. ⁸⁷ Charles was entangled in this phenomenon because, as discussed in section one, she was patronised by fashionable American women who came to London to find a husband and wanted their picture taken in a style that would assimilate them into aristocratic circles. In 1910 *The Tatler* reproduced a portrait by Lallie Charles of a Miss Gebhard 'whose people are well known in Paris and New York, and who have taken Lord Methuen's seat, Corsham Court, Wilts' under the title 'The American Invasion'. ⁸⁸

As historian Svetlana Boym has theorised, '[n]ostalgia inevitably reappears as a defence mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals'.89 People start to long for a time when things seemed simpler, or a time that never actually existed: '[n]ostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy', Boym writes. 90 The nostalgia that subsequent generations felt for the Edwardian era – imagined as one long, idle and peaceful summer before the First World War – has been well-documented by historians, yet for the Edwardian upper classes their own moment was also a time of great insecurity, when 'historical upheavals' also triggered nostalgic yearnings. 91 Surveying the cultural outputs and inventions of the Edwardians, it is obvious that they were longing for a sense of stability that their own moment could not provide—so much so that they invented entirely new forms of media and civic spectacle to indulge their nostalgic urges. According to Cannadine, popular magazines such as Country Life (to which Charles was a photographic contributor), for instance, packaged a 'dreamy, wistful, elegiac nostalgia for a vanishing rural England'.92 The historical pageant, an Edwardian institution in which communities staged elaborate mass re-enactments of historical

⁸⁶ The Tatler, 16 November 1904, p. 240.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ The Tatler, 15 June 1910, p. 281.

⁸⁹ Svetlana Boym, The Future of Nostalgia (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. xiv.

⁹⁰ Boym, p. xiii.

⁹¹ See O'Neill and Hatt.

⁹² David Cannadine, *The Pleasures of the Past* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1989), p. 93.

events in full costume, may also be considered a nostalgic 'defence mechanism'.93

Charles's aesthetic incorporated elements of a romanticised, 'age of innocence' past when beauty, gentility and 'noble birth' ensured the survival and supremacy of the aristocratic social system. As discussed in section one, in the customs of the upper classes it was the role of women to exhibit their family's status through public displays of wealth and leisure. To be depicted in a timeless 'white, shadowless void', to use Cecil Beaton's evocative description of Charles's style, with armfuls of flowers – the trappings of an idyllic old England – would have had a powerful appeal to the wealthy women of England who were watching their empire crumble and needed to assert their supremacy by channelling times of stability. ⁹⁴ As the historian Victor Keirnan wrote, '[a] class unwilling to quit the stage of history could take refuge in fantasy or, more positively, hearten itself for its journey into the future by hugging rags and tatters of the past'. ⁹⁵ Charles's portraits offered this fantasy. Her photographs were desirable because they transcended the present moment, providing escapism and idealism through a visual vocabulary that synthesised rococo pastoralism with romantic neoclassicism. ⁹⁶ It is this latter stylistic element to which I turn now.

Speaking to *The Ladies Field* in 1899, Charles revealed that she had studied the work of Frederic Leighton, a giant of the late Victorian classical revival. Comparing her own experiments in rendering drapery photographically, she stated:

It is impossible, almost [...] to give that effect of curve and movement to diaphanous fabrics which Sir Frederick Leighton, for instance, could secure in one of his paintings. As a perfectly plastic and quiet reproduction of graceful folds and softly-hung fabrics the photograph is effective. But put your figure in motion, and at once the folds refuse to adapt themselves even to the quickest

⁹³ Alice Stewart was the official photographer for the 1908 Chelsea Historical Pageant, discussed in chapter three.

⁹⁴ Beaton, *British Photographers*, p. 32.

⁹⁵ Victor Gordon Kiernan, *The Duel in European History: Honour and the Reign of Aristocracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 60. Cited in Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p. 500.

⁹⁶ Christopher Wood has argued that the Victorians were the 'spiritual heirs of the Romantic movement and the classicism that they created can certainly be defined as "romantic classicism". Christopher Wood, *Olympian Dreamers: Victorian Classical Painters 1860 - 1914* (London: Constable and Company, 1983), p. 17.

exposure.97

This statement attests to the scope of Charles's aesthetic and technical ambition in her commercial practice. Clearly the photographer had analysed limitations and advantages of the medium in terms of physics and materiality to conclude that photography had the capacity to create a sculptural record of textures that are carefully arranged ('graceful' and 'softly-hung') and still. The question is *why* Charles was looking at Frederic Leighton's paintings and making studies of draped figures? I suggest that Leighton's mythologising representations of women were compelling for Charles because they communicated ideals that she wanted to bring into her own work. She wanted to tap into the elevating capacities of classicism as well as its alignment with spectacle, its celebration of refined female sexuality and its potential for fantasy in order to imbue her portraits with a nostalgic affect and to produce a powerful feminine ideal.

The late nineteenth century classical revival in painting has been theorised as an effort to escape the turbulent present moment as artists who had been affiliated with the aesthetic movement chose to return to the subject matter of an idealised classical realm. This form of neoclassicism differed from the dynamic, virile incarnation of the previous century, instead emphasising passivity. This was, of course, a gendered affect and Leighton, a leader of this revival, became known for his feminised, romanticised scenes from Ancient Greece. Leighton and his contemporary Lawrence Alma Tadema exoticised and eroticised the classical world; works such as *In the Tepidarium* (1881) and *The Bath of Psyche* (circa 1890) employed the settings and customs of Ancient Greece to legitimise their sexually charged studies of nude women. In one of Leighton's more active compositions, *Greek Girls picking up pebbles* (1871) [Fig. 70], we can observe the kind of animation that Charles was studying – draperies float and billow, creating compelling shapes, with folds so intricate that they present a puzzle for the eye. In *An Elegy* (1888) [Fig. 71] Leighton depicts a woman wearing drapery in contemplative pose and it is likely from quieter works such as this that

⁹⁷ Morton Lane.

⁹⁸ Wood, p. 17.

⁹⁹ Wood, p. 54.

Charles took much of her inspiration.



Figure 70: Frederic Leighton, Girls Picking Up Pebbles, oil on canvas, 1871, 84 \times 130 cm The Pérez Simón Collection, Mexico.



Figure 71: Frederic Leighton, An Elegy, oil on canvas, 1888, 61.5 x 51.3 cm, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

In the same year that she spoke to *The Ladies Field* about Leighton (1899), Charles published two studies of women in *The Royal Magazine* [Figs. 72 – 73]. As Elaine Showalter has theorised, drapery and veiling performed a dualistic function in representations of women at the fin de siècle, and these photographs by Charles articulate the 'innocence and experience' binary that was reconciled within the construction of a feminine ideal. ¹⁰⁰ *Innocence* features a model draped in a white cloth, with downturned eyes in a similar expression and pose to Leighton's *An Elegy*. The posing and styling of the image conveys the photograph's theme, but Charles titled it unequivocally, '*Innocence*'. Her subject is framed as a classical beauty, the white covering signifying chastity and the concealing of female sexuality, a symbolism that Showalter has interpreted through a psychoanalytic framework as referencing the veil of the hymen. ¹⁰¹ By contrast, the overt, orientalised eroticism of *The Veil Lifted*, stages a seduction, the titillating moment of revelation. In comparison to *Innocence*,

¹⁰⁰ Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Virago, 1991), p. 144

¹⁰¹ Showalter, p. 145.

the model wears a dark veil through which we can see her bare breast and her eyes appear lined with kohl, which serves to intensify her active gaze, another contrast to *Innocence*'s modest lowered gaze. The model performs the part of the seductress, a recurring figure within the art of the literature of the 1890s, beginning with Oscar Wilde's *Salome* (1891) and Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations for the play (1893). The femme fatale remained vivid in the cultural imaginary into the twentieth century and when, in 1907, the actress Maud Allen performed the dance of the seven veils across Europe she created a 'Salome Craze'. Fashions of the time were informed by the tension between modesty and seduction evoked by veiling and drapery, a trend that was epitomised in the layered, diaphanous chiffon designs of Maison Lucile and advocated in Mrs Eric Pritchard's book *The Cult of Chiffon* (1902).



Figure 72: 'Innocence' by Lallie Charles, published in The Royal Magazine, 1899.

¹⁰² Showalter, p. 161.



Figure 73: 'The Veil Lifted' by Lallie Charles, published in The Royal Magazine, 1899.

Charles's harnessing of neoclassical and exoticising, orientalising themes to articulate a feminine ideal and explore the conflicted and contested nature of female sexuality within her 'fancy studies' at the fin de siècle can be observed in her later portraits of Society women. A portrait of Daphne Bourke, published in 1909 [Fig. 74], demonstrates how she incorporated such tropes into her portraiture, the grid of her trademark lattice window background serving to modernise the composition. To be depicted through the tropes of classicism was to be elevated to the status of an 'icon'. Greek and Roman goddesses have been represented throughout art history wearing draperies and veils, therefore by styling her subject in this way for a portrait, Charles evoked connotations of the ancient goddesses, figures who simultaneously represented virtue and sexual power. The symbolic message of such a representation is that women of the upper classes embodied these ideals. Bourke appears statuesque, looking away and up slightly, a pose that, combined with the bust-length composition of the portrait conveys a soft, feminine power and sophisticated desirability, the kind that upper class women needed to perform to shore up their families' supremacy.



Figure 74: Daphne Bourke by Lallie Charles, published in The Tatler, 1909.

The veil that Charles employed so frequently in her portraiture around this time was not only reserved for youthful female sitters. When photographing the celebrated Victorian actress Ellen Terry in her middle age, Charles tactfully posed her subject with a diaphanous white veil covering her hair and elegantly drawn across her neck [Fig. 75]. This artistic direction creates an appearance of youth and glamour in two ways. Firstly, it has a practical function, serving to produce a sharpened jawline, disguising the lines and looser skin that would inevitably have been visible on the 60-year-old's neck and decolletage (Terry's face has been substantially retouched). Secondly, the concealing gesture that Terry makes with the veil, drawing it under her chin, combined with her direct gaze into the lens has an exotic, sensual element to it, seeming to subtly tease the viewer in a flirtatious, youthful way. Under Charles's treatment, Terry is portrayed as a graceful beauty who still holds sexual power, defying the typical desexualising of older women.



Figure 75: Ellen Terry by Lallie Charles, published by Raphael Tuck & Sons., bromide postcard print, circa 1906, National Portrait Gallery, London.

The most notable iconographic association of a veiled feminine figure is, of course, the Virgin Mary, the epitome of virtue. Charles exploited an overt religiosity in her portraits, as can be seen in figures 76 and 77. These portraits show two portraits of women in contemplative attitudes with veiled heads that were published in *The Tatler* in 1908 and 1912 respectively. In Figure 76 Miss Bowes-Lyon lowers her eyes and hold her hands to her chin in prayer. Her hair is worn stylishly and the nape of her neck is exposed, elegantly bare. The veil serves a dual function, conveying piety and modesty as well as sensuality, glamour and fashionability.

Charles's portrait of Viola Tree [Fig. 77] was reproduced by *The Tatler* integrated with a miniature portrait of her fiancé, Alan Romaine Parsons, and was created with the announcement of their engagement in mind. It makes a statement about the kind of woman Tree is – or how she wanted to be perceived as she transitioned into a new stage of womanhood. She is depicted as a glamorous, modern Madonna, eyes lowered in contemplation with her hands crossed over her heart. The pose echoes that of the Virgin, consistent throughout paintings of the Annunciation

from the Renaissance. In these depictions, the Virgin, who has been at prayer, typically holds her hands to her chest, indicating her acceptance of being chosen by God and submission to His will through her lowered eyes and bowed head. Charles has posed Viola Tree in a more restrained version of this pose: Tree's hands are placed on top of one another and pressed to the chest rather than her arms forming a full cross. By referencing a religious visual language that was universally understood in Christian countries, Charles's portrait elevated her subject to the status of icon.



Figure 76: Miss Bowes-Lyon by Lallie Charles, published in The Tatler, 1908.



Figure 77: Viola Tree by Lallie Charles, published in The Tatler, 1912.

Charles would not have needed to look to Renaissance paintings to find representations of the Virgin to borrow from. Religious studies in the photographic medium had been produced since the 1860s with the rise of 'aesthetic' photography, particularly in the work of Julia Margaret Cameron who was at the turn of the twentieth century already considered one of the most notable female photographers since the medium's inception. Cameron's work was frequently exhibited in London in the period that Charles was active, and her name was often in the press through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially when Alfred Tennyson, one of Cameron's most esteemed subjects, died in 1892. Charles would likely have been familiar with Cameron's photographs, therefore, even if she didn't explicitly attest to Cameron's influence. As a woman competing in a male-dominated industry, she might even have thought of Cameron as a photographic foremother. A consideration of these photographers' work side-by-side – Charles's portrait of the actress Ethel Barrymore from the mid 1900s [Fig. 78] and Cameron's Mary Mother (1867) [Fig. 79] – suggests that Charles may have drawn her photographic vocabulary from earlier photographic movements.



Figure 78: Miss Ethel Barrymore by Lallie Charles, published by Raphael Tuck & Sons, bromide postcard print, 1900-1910, National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure 79: Julia Margaret Cameron, Mary Mother, Albumen print from wet collodion glass negative, 1867, 650mm x 500mm, V&A, London.

In Charles's portrait Barrymore turns to the left, her chin angled down to expose the side of her neck. The front of her voluminous hairstyle is visible from under a soft translucent headscarf, which drapes around her shoulders and meets another slightly darker fabric drape (likely a pastel colour) that covers her shoulders and arms. The light, coming from Barrymore's right-hand side, shines through the pale headdress, causing the diaphanous fabric to glow and gentle shadows to form across her face. The nape of Barrymore's neck and part of her chest is illuminated. Her skin is flawless. A patch of light directly behind her head gives the portrait an ethereal quality and has the effect of making Barrymore appear somewhat saintly.

These photographers were working with very different photographic techniques forty years apart, however, both Charles and Cameron used the photographic medium to make 'artistic' studies of women that elevated their subject to a feminine ideal and there are striking similarities between these photographs. Both subjects are posed with the face turned to the left and the chin tilted downward. In both photographs the drapery is not being contained by the photograph's frame. The negative space around the subjects ensures our attention is focused on their features and the texture of the drapery. Feminine softness, passivity, gentleness and piety are communicated.

While photographic history has mythologised Julia Margaret Cameron's genius and originality, remembering her as a pioneer and innovator, Charles has not been granted anything like the same level of interest. This is despite the fact that contemporary commentators who witnessed both women's achievements often made the comparison between Charles's success and Cameron's. Harry Furniss wrote in his section on female artists in *Some Victorian Women* (1923), '[a]Ithough painters may not agree with me, I hold that photography is an art [...] and depends upon the personality of the photographer quite as much perhaps as picture on an artist's easel. It is an art in which women have excelled: Mrs. Cameron in the old Victorian days; Alice Hughes and Madame Lallie Charles of a later period'. The language of art was, therefore, applied to Charles's portraiture in her own time. She was described as a

¹⁰³ Furniss, pp. 93–94.

'lady artist of the camera' and journalists noted that '[i]n a short time she succeeded in becoming a woman who was spoken of, not only as a photographer, but as an artist'. ¹⁰⁴ Her portraits were often described not as photographs but 'charming camera pictures' or 'picturesque' studies. ¹⁰⁵ The language here is significant: in the parlance of the time, a 'picture' denoted something aesthetically elevated, or idealised, whereas a photograph indicated something mechanical, without artistic merit. ¹⁰⁶ A photographic portrait therefore, often meant a 'painfully true likeness without any of those softening touches which can do so much to make a plain face look its best' according to *The Lady's Realm* in 1900. ¹⁰⁷ The 'softening touch', as this chapter has shown, was Charles's calling card. Her work was remarkable because it succeeded in reconciling the tension between the commercial and the artistic: as *The Lady's Realm* concluded, 'Madame Lallie Charles, at all events, has proved that portraits and pictures are now compatible terms'. ¹⁰⁸

Conclusion: Fair Women

The cultural influence that Charles wielded at the height of her career is demonstrated by her celebrated 'Five Hundred Fair Women' exhibition of portraits at her studio 'salon' in June 1910. Ever the shrewd businesswoman, Charles staged this event to dovetail with The International Society's third 'Fair Women' exhibition during early summer 1910 at the Grafton Gallery, which displayed fine art painted portraits by both modern and historical 'masters'. ¹⁰⁹ This decision speaks loudly of Charles's artistic

¹⁰⁴ Morton Lane.

¹⁰⁵ Caption accompanying a portrait of Miss Felicity Tree by Lallie Charles. *The Tatler*, 3 December 1913, p. 286.

¹⁰⁶ The term 'camera picture' was associated with Pictorialist photography. It would have been widely understood to be denoting a particular type of photographic work that had more 'lofty' artistic aspirations, as evidenced by a discussion of the terminology in *The Illustrated London News*. Writing on Alvin Langdon Coburn, the author states sarcastically that 'we used to call them photographs', puts 'camera artists' in quotations to signal his aversion to the term and mock apologises for using the term 'photographs'. *The Illustrated London News*, 25 October 1913, p. 672.

¹⁰⁷ 'Madame Lallie Charles's Portraits', p. 40.

^{108 &#}x27;Madame Lallie Charles's Portraits', p. 41.

¹⁰⁹ The 'Fair Women' exhibitions began at the Grafton Gallery in 1894. Alluding to Alfred Tennyson's poem 'A Dream of Fair Women" (1833), these exhibitions were comprised of loans of historical and contemporary portraits of women noted for their beauty or influence. Meaghan Clarke's work has demonstrated women's centrality as collectors, curators and cultural arbiters in this phenomenon as well as prominent consumers of the exhibitions (Meaghan Clarke, *Fashionability, Exhibition Culture and*

ambition, competing with the biggest names in European art history that would be fresh in the audience's minds when they walked into her 'salon'. Moreover, almost all of the portraits of women on display at the Grafton exhibition were by men. By contrast, here was a woman, exhibiting her work produced in a medium that many believed could not match up to painting. Charles's self-assurance paid off. *The Queen* remarked that the exhibition was interesting not just for the 'collection of lovely faces' whose 'features [Charles's] camera records artistically' but also 'because it reveals the high standard of art to which photographic portraiture can attain'. ¹¹⁰

With this audacious and vast exhibition Charles secured her reputation as an arbiter of femininity on both sides of the Atlantic. *The Tatler* ran a double page spread of four highlights from the exhibition, reporting that '[c]ertain it is that there is no great social leader, either in London or America, who is not represented'. ¹¹¹ *The Bystander* reported that the exhibition 'should attract not only those interested in artistic photography, but every lover of the beautiful'. ¹¹² After the success of the June 1910 exhibition that cemented her reputation as a 'servant' to the most beautiful of English women, the photographer hosted another exhibition the following summer. ¹¹³ As Meaghan Clarke has noted, Charles was at the vanguard of the 'Fair Women' spectacle in the photographic tradition, with E. O. Hoppé and Cecil Beaton later exhibiting their own often eroticised portraits of women in their respective publications *Book of Fair Women* (1921) and *The Book of Beauty* (1930). ¹¹⁴

Some of the most illustrious figures of the late Victorian and Edwardian periods sat for Lallie Charles. Her career lasted over two decades, making her a household name, yet her commercial popularity, artistic innovation, cultural influence and critical acclaim elucidated in this chapter have been ignored within dominant photographic histories. The comparison to Julia Margaret Cameron that Harry Furniss made in 1923 is significant, because it shows that people who lived at the same time as both photographers put them on the same pedestal. Why is it, then, to take an example

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Gender Politics: Fair Women (London and New York: Routledge, 2020). Thanks are due to Meaghan for drawing this aspect of Charles's career to my attention and discussions about the historical background.
¹¹⁰ The Queen, 11 June 1910, p. 33.

¹¹¹ The Tatler, 29 June 1910, pp. 352–53.

¹¹² The Bystander, 29 June 1910, p. 646.

¹¹³ 29 June 1910.; The Tatler, 14 June 1911, p. 8.

¹¹⁴ Clarke, Fashionability, Exhibition Culture and Gender Politics: Fair Women, p. 171.

discussed above, that Lallie Charles's portrait of Ellen Terry is obscured while Julia Margaret Cameron's 1864 portrait of the actress (also reproduced and distributed on a postcard) is so well-known [Fig. 80]? If contemporary commentators did not differentiate in terms of Charles's and Cameron's importance within photographic history, the disparity in the way they have been historicised has occurred through the subsequent rehearsal of various institutional and disciplinary biases.



Figure 80: Ellen Terry by Julia Margaret Cameron, carbon print, negative 1864, print about 1875, J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.



Figure 81: Ellen Terry by Lallie Charles, published by Raphael Tuck & Sons., bromide postcard print, circa 1906, National Portrait Gallery, London.

Contrary to the institutional preservation of Cameron's oeuvre as prints, Charles's photographs are predominantly accessible to us through reproduction, on postcards and in print, which have less curatorial currency and less value within the art market for historical photographs. Moreover, commerce is written into the image when it is disseminated through popular media. To curatorial and academic orthodoxies that privilege aesthetic or avant garde intention, authenticity and originality, a portrait on a postcard is cheapened, its 'aura' diminished, to invoke Walter Benjamin. 115 To be clear, I am not arguing that Charles deserves a place in the canon alongside Cameron, but rather drawing attention to the limitations of a dominant history constructed via canons, which are often arbitrary and, as Griselda Pollock observes, constituted through masculinist, narcissistic conceptions of 'greatness'. 116 Charles has not been given a place in the canon, likely because her work was tainted by commerce, ubiquitous within the vast machine of celebrity and inscribed with a 'sentimental' femininity. In this chapter I have challenged such appraisals to demonstrate instead the historically specific values attributed to Charles's portraits, unpicking the contemporary appeal of her style, and the significant role that her portraits played within the social rituals of the upper classes in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain, and celebrity culture more broadly.

As the title of this chapter suggests, Charles's studio was not a place where femininity was passively represented, but a site where its ideals were manufactured. Elite womanhood was constructed by the photographer through the complex interplay of affects that she imbued her work with. Not only did she please her clients, who, as we saw in section one returned to face her lens as they passed through the stages and rites of womanhood, she also satisfied a broader public appetite for feminine spectacle. Charles borrowed iconographic and aesthetic tropes from art history, contemporary art and a fine art photographic heritage, blending and commercialising them to produce a unique visual language of fashionability and desirability that proved irresistible for so many women.

¹¹⁵ Benjamin, p. 221.

¹¹⁶ Pollock, Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desires and the Writing of Art's Histories, pp. 9, 13.

Chapter 6 Representing women: agency and erasure



Figure 82: Rita Martin by Lallie Charles, cream-toned bromide print on photographer's card, c.1907, National Portrait Gallery, London.

In the above portrait the photographer Rita Martin (1875 – 1958) is depicted in an oval frame in profile, as if on a cameo brooch. She wears a white blouse with a bib collar and a white beret and her hair, shiny and waved, is pinned at the nape of her neck. The photograph, taken by Lallie Charles, Martin's elder sister, is typical of her style in its creamy tones and the dazzling whiteness of the sitter's attire. Yet integral parts of this portrait lack clarity as the lighting bleaches detail, and it appears overexposed. The contours of Martin's profile are faint against the pale backdrop and the viewer's eyes must search hard for them. There is a definition to her pupil, her nostril and lips, and a texture to her hat and hair but everything else dissipates, becoming ghostly under the milky wash of too much light.

This photograph carries an affective charge for me because the experience of looking at it – moving across substance to an indistinct trace or outline – is akin to the experience of researching Rita Martin's life and work. She fills the frame in the way that she dominated the commercial photographic industry she worked in; Martin is definitely there – was definitely there – but at the same time she recedes into the background. She is faded, fading, at risk of disappearing entirely, and I am unsure of the best way to restore her. The portrait seems to visualise the problematics of erasure that motivate and permeate this study more broadly, and it speaks to the dilemma of how to make visible women's experiences and agency when empirical evidence is fragmentary or absent.

This concluding chapter engages with these problematics in all their complexity, employing a more self-reflexive register. I have chosen to focus on Rita Martin for four reasons. Firstly, the intertwined careers of her and her sister Lallie Charles tell a story about the representation of women in the early twentieth century, in particular the changing face of celebrity femininity in this period and what was at stake for women personally and professionally in sitting for a portrait. It makes sense, therefore, to discuss the sisters in relation to one another, sequentially, within this thesis. Martin left her role as assistant to Charles in 1906, following ten years as her assistant, to set up her own photographic enterprise on London's Baker Street. Soon after Martin established her studio her idealised and highly popular portraits rivalled Charles's virtual monopoly as photographer to the most fashionable and famous women of the day. There are countless examples of the sisters' work rubbing

shoulders in Society magazines, for example figure 83, in which their stylistically very similar portraits of recently engaged women are reproduced side by side. According to Cecil Beaton, the 'pale terracotta loveliness' of Martin's portraits became 'part and parcel of this period'. Secondly, it also appropriate to end the thesis with Martin, who may be conceived of as a 'bridge' between two eras, in terms of a chronology of women's practice of studio portraiture in Britain. Beginning her career in the late Victorian period and working into the modernist period, Martin was operating alongside the next generation of women studio photographers such as Yevonde and Dorothy Wilding, contemporaries who opened their studios in London just before the First World War. Thirdly, Martin occupies a unique place within the photography of this period because she worked on both sides of the camera.² As we saw in the previous chapter, Martin was her sister's model in the early years of the business, performing in a variety of 'fancy pictures' in which her sexuality was offered up for viewer's consumption. This aspect of Martin's early career has complex ramifications for her later work as a commercial photographer specialising in portraits of female stage performers, a practice that rendered her complicit within a system that commodified women's bodies and treated them as sexual objects. Finally, the almost total dearth of existing primary sources relating to Rita Martin's life and work, despite her professional success and esteemed reputation in her own era, render her a productive case study to articulate the challenges of historical research into women's agency and experiences.³ The way that Martin has been overlooked historically replicates the way that she was overlooked in the first ten years of her career, eclipsed - deliberately or inadvertently - by her older sister who fashioned a cult of personality around herself. As feminist historians we are well-versed in identifying the ways that men have historically obstructed and erased women's contributions, but Martin's career raises the uncomfortable and tangly issue of how women can obscure or even

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¹ Beaton, *The Book of Beauty*, p. 20.

² The only other well-known female photographer to work as a model and then as a photographer in the early twentieth century was Lee Miller, as far as I am aware.

³ Martin is mentioned briefly in the following texts by Cecil Beaton, who was heavily influenced by her work: Cecil Beaton, 'Lovely Lily Elsie', in *The Rise and Fall of the Matinée Idol: Past Deities of Stage and Screen, Their Roles, Their Magic, and Their Worshippers*, ed. by Anthony Curtis (London: New English Library, 1976), pp. 3–19 (p. 10). Beaton and Buckland, p. 271. Beaton, *British Photographers*, p. 39.

sabotage other women's successes, curtail their agency, or co-opt their labour for their own gain.



Figure 83: Miss Daisy Blair by Lallie Charles and Miss Nina Abercromby by Rita Martin published in The Bystander, 1909.

The competition or rivalry between women photographers is a subject I have not addressed thus far as my attention has been drawn instead to positive moments of co-operation, where women supported one another's advancement. Chapters three and four considered the alliances formed by women photographers, on the domestic scale of an intimate partnership and then as part of a broader, collective feminist project within the political public sphere. My sustained exploration of this theme is

perhaps an example of the of the feminist historian's predisposition to seek out examples of 'sisterly camaraderie' in the lives or works of women artists, a tendency identified by feminist art historians Amy Tobin and Victoria Horne in their essay 'An Unfinished Revolution in Art Historiography, or How to Write a Feminist Art History'.⁴ Tobin and Horne raise the important point of the feminist researcher's desire for certain narratives (such as a female artist's struggle or heroic achievement) and reflect on the spike of disappointment if/when our subjects fail to meet our expectations. The authors suggest that narratives such as women consciously choosing to work together and therefore exercising political agency in the past afford the present-day researcher a distinct pleasure, and I will admit to my own pleasure in finding examples of sisterhood and solidarity in historical documents. Martin and Charles's relationship frustrates that desire and provides a sobering example of how some women's individual successes come at the expense of other women's erasure or even exploitation.

In the thesis introduction I referenced Judith Allen's influential essay 'Evidence and Silence: Feminism and the Limits of History' in which she examines the common dilemma faced by feminist historians: how to write about women's agency and experiences in the past when documentation is missing or patchy? By way of a solution, Allen proposes the use of 'deduction, inference, symptomatic reading or accounting for absences and silences in extant evidence' and argues that 'without room for these methods of evaluating silence a meaningful women's history cannot be written'. This chapter charts my efforts to evaluate silence using the methods that Allen advocates and my conclusions are therefore necessarily more speculative. I have not attempted to hide the messiness or frustrations of feminist research, in fact, part of the point of this chapter is to wrangle with them in full view to reveal the challenges of this work.

Martin did not speak publicly about her work, so records of her practice are limited to the portraits themselves. This required me to approach her career aslant,

⁴ Victoria Horne and Amy Tobin, 'An Unfinished Revolution in Art Historiography, or How to Write a Feminist Art History', *Feminist Review*, 107.1 (2014), 75–83.

⁵ Allen, p. 176.

⁶ Allen, p. 176.

and I began looking to Martin's sitters to try to understand her practice of studio portraiture. I immersed myself in the lives of the celebrity women that Martin photographed, who might lead me to more information about her – an actress's memoir, a letter, a diary, a contract or an account recorded in a magazine of what it was like to be photographed by Rita Martin. This survey was not fruitful in terms of locating primary sources, but I noticed that one individual appeared in Martin's oeuvre repeatedly. Gertie Millar (1879 – 1952), a musical comedy actress and star of the Edwardian stage, was photographed by Martin consistently for a decade until the end of Millar's theatrical career. I was curious as to what drove Millar's loyalty. In the Museum of London's collection there is a photographic album containing thirty-six portraits of Millar, all of them taken by Martin.8 The actress did not write a memoir or speak about her professional relationship with Martin at all, but the album, likely compiled by the photographer herself, tells its own story. This object became my springboard for a deeper enquiry into Millar's life and career that might explain why she returned again and again to Martin's studio. I attempted to reconstruct the conditions around these women's repeated encounters through archival research into Millar's life, the events of which were well documented in the contemporary press.

As a celebrated musical comedy performer at the height of the Edwardian postcard 'craze', Millar's image was heavily commodified. In 1906, the same year that Martin opened her studio, the actress became a victim of image fraud when portraits of her produced by the photographic studio Bassano were sold to a commercial postcard publisher, Dunn and Co., who used them to manufacture fake portraits of her. Millar unsuccessfully sued the publisher for libel and the court proceedings were chronicled in the national press. This case provides valuable insight into the stakes for women who traded on their image in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods, social attitudes towards them, and the role of commercial photographers within this system

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⁷ Theatre historian Viv Gardner has researched Gertie Millar's life, see Viv Gardner, 'Gertie Millar and the "Rules for Actresses and Vicars" Wives", in *Extraordinary Actors: Essays on Popular Performers*, ed. by Jane Milling and Martin Banham (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), pp. 97–112.; Viv Gardner, 'Defending the Body, Defending the Self: Women Performers and the Law in the "Long" Edwardian Period', in *Stage Women*, *1900–50: Female Theatre Workers and Professional Practice*, ed. by Maggie B. Gale and Kate Dorney (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), pp. 138–60.

⁸ Many thanks to Jilke Golbach, Curator of Photographs at the Museum of London, who acted as my eyes, examining and filming the album for me during the Museum's closure.

of celebrity. The documentation that I analyse reveals the rife misogyny that pervaded the interlinked theatrical and photographic industries in the early twentieth century. Mass consumerism and public spectacle grew and sexual mores loosened as the twentieth century progressed. The rapacious commodification of women's bodies through photography accelerated, yet women who worked in the public domain had little control over their own images. Within this hostile landscape, I argue that Millar's decision to be represented consistently by Martin after her ordeal with Dunn & Co. indicates that the photographer was able to offer her sitter an alternative to the treatment she had received from male-run studios: Martin gave Millar control of her image.

I begin with an examination of the Gertie Millar album, which demonstrates the scope of her collaboration with Martin. This section examines the photographs in detail and the economy that they fuelled. I consider how actresses were figured as icons of modernity in this period and the ways that their images were consumed by male and female viewers. The second section tracks back to the events preceding Millar's work with Martin. I examine primary sources that give accounts of the trial in order to access Millar's own voice and experience to understand how it affected her and how it may have influenced her subsequent decision to work with a woman photographer over a man. I interpret this decision as an effort to regain control of her body and image within a misogynistic industry that had stripped her of agency. Following this I turn back to Martin to examine her modelling work for Lallie Charles, a facet of her career that I argue enabled an affinity with Millar as a both women had experienced the commodification of their sexuality. This discussion segues into a symptomatic reading of newspaper coverage of the Lallie Charles studio through which the limits placed on Martin's agency can be deduced, findings that support my assertion of the sympathy that existed between Martin and Millar and link us back to the problem of women's historical erasure. Here, as within previous chapters, women photographers' complicity with the commercial diktat to objectify women cannot be easily reconciled with the moments that they acted in sympathy, or solidarity with their female sitters or peers, or resisted the status quo. In this chapter especially, through the tangles of individual relationships between women that I tease apart, and Martin's doubling as photographer and muse, I show that women who earned a living

behind the camera and those who performed front of it both worked under the 'predicament of femininity in phallocentric cultures', to use Griselda Pollock's astute formulation. Pollock's framing of femininity as a predicament encapsulates the conflicts and tensions that arise out of the difficulties of living as a woman and, for the discussion at hand, helps us to recognise the context in which both Martin and Millar colluded in, and profited from, the production of images that packaged women's sexuality for consumption by a desiring public.

Gertie Millar and Rita Martin

Gertie Millar (married name Monckton) was born into a working-class family in Yorkshire in 1879. She worked as a stage performer from childhood and got her break aged twenty-one when she was spotted by her future husband, the composer Lionel Monckton, and brought from the provinces to perform at London's Gaiety Theatre where she became one of theatre impresario George Edwardes's adored troupe of 'Gaiety Girls'. From the early 1900s until the First World War Millar was one of the most popular and celebrated performers in the country. According to her biographer Kurt Gänzl, Millar 'made her name on that mixture of ingénue charm and soubrette vivacity' and her appeal was one of 'personality and charm rather than of talent in performance'. 11

Like all of her Gaiety Girl co-stars, Millar's image was heavily commodified. Popular actresses in this period made part of their income by sitting to studio photographers who paid them a fee for the exclusive contract to produce their portraits. Photographers would then sell the image rights to publishers who in turn reproduced them as postcards to be sold in train stations, news-stands, tobacconists, and other retailers. Millar was a favourite 'picture postcard beauty' at the height of the postcard collecting craze and how the public perceived her was vital to her success as an actress. Her image, therefore, had to be carefully constructed and controlled.

⁹ Pollock, Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desires and the Writing of Art's Histories, p. 33.

¹⁰ Kurt Gänzl, *Millar, Gertrude [Gertie] [Married Names Gertrude Monckton; Gertrude Ward, Countess of Dudley] (1879–1952), Actress* (Oxford University Press, 2004) https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/35022.

¹¹ Gänzl.

¹² Actresses were able to negotiate these deals for themselves. Beaton, 'Lovely Lily Elsie', p. 17.

In the early twentieth century mass consumerism was fast becoming the governing principle of society, the consumer the foundation of a new democratic order. The 'spectacularization' of femininity, to borrow photographic theorist Abigail Solomon-Godeau's term, was integral to this process. 13 Considering the 'visual economy of feminine display', Solomon-Godeau elucidates the 'ideological naturalization of the feminine-as-spectacle' in relation to commodity fetishism, arguing that the erotics of femininity and the seduction of the commodity collapse into one another within capitalist society. 14 It is possible to observe this process of transference of desire from the 'spectacularized' female body onto the commodity form very explicitly in the mechanisms of the Edwardian theatre as department stores and fashion designers negotiated with the managers of theatres to dress female performers in their products/designs, thus creating living advertisements. 15 The theatre even simulated the department store with a spate of musical comedies that were actually set in shops. 16 Critically overlooked as an integral part of this economy is the studio photograph, infinitely reproducible as a collectable postcard that kept consumer and spectator desires in circulation.

The circumstances under which the Gertie Millar album [Fig. 84] entered the Museum of London collection are unknown, as is its original purpose. None of the prints are stamped with a copyright line and have only been identified as being made by Rita Martin through cross referencing with works in other collections. Pencil annotations at the top of the album pages note the production corresponding to the role that Millar performs in the portrait. The album was unpublished, and it is not known who compiled it, although the numerical identification system on the mounts, the chronological sequencing and the types of prints (gelatin silver prints) strongly

¹³ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, 'The Other Side of Venus: The Visual Economy of Feminine Display', in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, ed. by Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough (Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), p. 114.

¹⁵ Martin's photographs of Millar in the Museum of London album show that she wore a dress by couturier Lucile (Lady Duff Gordon) for her role in 'The Quaker Girl' in 1911. The dress is held within the Museum of London's collection (accession number: 28.125/1). The scholarship of Erika Rappaport, Joel H. Kaplan, Sheila Stowell and Peter Bailey amongst others has explicated the material links between theatre and conspicuous consumption that developed in the period 1890 – 1914, fuelled by the sexualised display of women's bodies.

¹⁶ The 1909 Gaiety production 'Our Miss Gibbs', in which Millar plays the title role, is set in a shop called 'Garrods' (i.e. Harrods).

suggest that it was a professional document composed by the photographer. The Gertie Millar album is a rare object because it features portraits of just one individual by one photographer. For context, the National Portrait Gallery collection has hundreds of photographic albums in its holdings, but the overwhelming majority feature a number of individuals by one photographer or the same individual by different photographers depending on by whom, and why, it was compiled. I have not yet come across an album with portraits of one sitter by the same photographer.

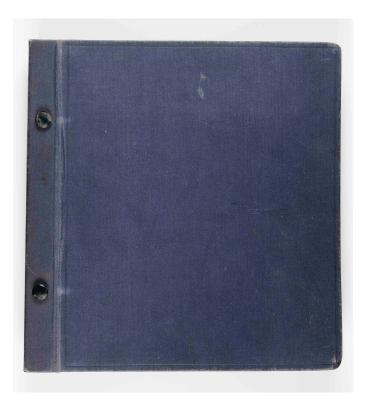


Figure 84: Gertie Millar and Rita Martin Album, c. 1916, Museum of London.

Previously dismissed as an anodyne domestic and sentimental form, photographic albums compiled by Victorian women have engendered feminist critical interest since the 1990s as their potential for unsettling normative gendered values of the period has been explored.¹⁷ Although the Gertie Millar album was not a domestic album, it does have an affective quality of feminine intimacy, like a domestic object, because of its contained, dyadic nature and chronology: it tells both the story of one woman's theatrical career and an artistic collaboration between two women. One way to

¹⁷ See Lindsay Smith. And Di Bello.

understand this object is as a document of the sustained, reiterated encounters between two women. It seems to hold the elusive promise of revealing something to the person who opens it about how these women interacted and what magnetism kept Millar returning to the same studio on Baker Street with a suitcase full of her costumes (often several per production), occasionally with her pet dogs in tow, to perform for Martin's camera.

In fact, the album was likely created with a commercial and therefore very *public* agenda. My theory is that it was a professional portfolio compiled by Rita Martin to demonstrate to clients her studio's prestige through the accolade of a starlet's loyalty and her brand's consistency and its subtle innovations over the years. It was most likely placed in the reception room of Martin's studio where her typically female clients could peruse it and be seduced by the idea that they would receive the same beautifying treatment as the great Gertie Millar.



Figure 85: Gertie Millar by Rita Martin, gelatin silver print, c. 1906 – 1909, Museum of London.

Beginning with an image taken some time between 1906 – 1909 [Fig. 85] and the final image taken in one of Millar's final roles, 'Houp-La' in 1916, the album charts a long collaboration between the photographer and the actress. The sequencing documents Millar's career, showing her posing as her characters in The Quaker Girl, The Dancing Mistress, A Country Girl, The Marriage Market, Gipsy Love, Bric a Brac and Hoop-La, before she retired from the stage in 1918. Editors of popular magazine *The Bystander* commented in 1913 that they 'tremble[d] to think how many times Miss Millar has faced the camera during her career', which makes it all the more remarkable that the

camera she returned to face again and again was Rita Martin's.¹⁸ The actress was photographed by Martin in every role she played, from 1909 in her role as Miss Gibbs in 'Our Miss Gibbs' up until her final stage appearance in 'Flora' in 1918 (this final role was not documented in the album suggesting it was assembled in 1916/17).¹⁹ Apart from one sitting with Bassano for her role in Gipsy Love in 1912, she remained entirely loyal to Martin during this period.

Martin's studio became an extension of the stage as Millar capered [Fig. 86], clowned [Fig. 87], danced [Fig. 88], played with her dogs [Figs. 89 – 90] and posed with a pistol [Fig. 91]. She appears in manifold attitudes: whimsical, mysterious, sheepish, aloof, rollicking, goofy, pious. The pose and the tone vary greatly: she is light on her feet [Fig. 92] or rooted with legs wide and arms crossed [Fig. 93], grinning [Fig. 94] or gazing wistfully into the lens [Fig. 95]. Martin has captured her different personas, from tomboy to lady, seductress in feathers to innocent girl in quaker dress, rendering each iteration with the same tonal softness, skilful lighting and flattering poses that were characteristic of her style. Martin did not use backgrounds for her portraits and was highly selective with props if she did employ them, artistic decisions that resulted in an unembellished aesthetic that focused the viewer's attention wholly on the sitter, without interference. As a result of this stylistic choice, the sitters' facial expression, body language and styling had to communicate the tone of the portrait without assistance from the usual trappings of the commercial studio.

¹⁸ The Bystander, 24 September 1913, p. 661.

¹⁹ The Sketch, 24 April 1918, p. 95.



Figure 86: Gertie Millar (in 'Houp La') by Rita Martin, gelatin silver print, c. 1916, Museum of London.



Figure 87: Gertie Millar (in 'Our Miss Gibbs') by Rita Martin, gelatin silver print, c. 1909, Museum of London.



Figure 88: Gertie Millar (in 'The Dancing Mistress'), gelatin silver print, c. 1912, Museum of London.



Figure 89: Gertie Millar (in 'Our Miss Gibbs') by Rita Martin, gelatin silver print, c. 1909, Museum of London.



Figure 90: Gertie Millar (in 'Bric-a-Brac') by Rita Martin, gelatin silver print, c. 1915, Museum of London.



Figure 91: Gertie Millar (in 'Houp La') by Rita Martin, gelatin silver print, c. 1916, Museum of London.



Figure 92: Gertie Millar (in 'The Dancing Mistress') by Rita Martin, gelatin silver print, c. 1912, Museum of London



Figure 93: Gertie Millar (in 'Bric-a-Brac') by Rita Martin, gelatin silver print, c. 1915, Museum of London.



Figure 94: Gertie Millar (in 'Gipsy Love') by Rita Martin, gelatin silver print, c. 1912, Museum of London.



Figure 95: Gertie Millar (in 'A Country Girl') by Rita Martin, gelatin silver print, c. 1914, Museum of London.

As Erika Rappaport has observed of this period, the actress 'represent[ed] a new kind of femininity that was closely tied to the mass production of images'.²⁰ A product of the expanding commercial culture, the actress was a 'figure of public pleasure': she represented social mobility, a more liberated sexuality, and the democratisation of glamour.²¹ She was also the prototype for modern female subjectivity, able to transform herself into different roles and perform imaginative possibilities for women. In the 1900s and 1910s stage actresses began to replace the society lady as a new model of aspirational femininity, the precursor to the Hollywood 'film star'. With her portraits of Millar, Martin contributed towards the construction of a new feminine ideal.

The purpose of these portrait sittings was publicity, as they were used either directly to promote the production Millar was performing in, capitalising on her desirability and popularity, or to serve her public visibility more broadly. Many of the album portraits appeared on the front covers or on spreads inside popular titles such as *The Tatler* and *The Sketch*.²² Furthermore, a cross reference with the National Portrait Gallery's collection reveals that many of the Museum of London album portraits, or portraits made during the same sittings, were bought from Rita Martin by publishers such as J. Beagles & Co. who manufactured commercial postcards from them. See for example figures 96 – 99 below, which show the album prints (or prints from the same sitting) next to the corresponding mass-produced postcard featuring Gertie Millar's portrait.

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²⁰ Rappaport, p. 185.

²¹ Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 19.

²² For example, *The Sketch*, 9 November 1910, p. 137. shows Millar in 'The Quaker Girl', corresponding to IN23298 in Museum of London album. Front cover of *The Tatler*, 4 June 1913, carried portrait of Millar in 'The Marriage Market', 1914, corresponding to IN23310 in Museum of London album.



Figure 96: Gertie Millar (in 'The Dancing Mistress') by Rita Martin, gelatin silver print, 1912, Museum of London.



Figure 97: Gertie Millar by Rita Martin, published by Rotary Photographic Co Ltd, bromide postcard print, 1912, National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure 98: Gertie Millar (in 'The Dancing Mistress'), gelatin silver print, 1912, Museum of London.



Figure 99: Gertie Millar by Rita Martin, published by J. Beagles & Co, bromide postcard print, 1912, National Portrait Gallery, London.

The postcard craze began in Britain in the late 1890s and was at its peak in 1903. Prior to 1906, women were the main collectors of postcards but after 1906 the majority of postcard collectors were male. This has been attributed to the fact that women primarily collected postcards displaying landscapes and works of art but after 1906 new themed postcards displaying portraits of actresses and 'beauties' entered the market, which predominantly appealed to men.²³ These cheap, sought-after images that could be obtained easily became a vehicle for the period's celebrity culture. It is important to note that women did also enjoy collecting and sending portraits of actresses and we must consider a queer female gaze, as well as a fantasising female gaze through which a woman could project herself into the lifestyle of fame and fortune that the actress epitomised. Scholarship on the feminine cultures around postcard collecting in Britain in this period is limited, but Veronica Kelly has shown how in Australia, communities, often of young women, were forged around postcard collecting and circulation between fans.²⁴

In their visual coding portrait postcards of Edwardian actresses showed their subject as playful, charming and coquettish, carrying enough glamour and sex appeal to satisfy a desiring gaze while maintaining respectability. Indeed, the sexual politics enshrined in the picture postcard as a commodity was epitomised in the popular song of the period, 'The picture postcard girls' written by A.J. Mills and Bennett Scott. In this ditty, a single man, 'retiring and shy', covets photographs of all the stage beauties of the day who are plastered all over the walls of his attic room.²⁵ The lyrics describe euphemistically his fantasies about the women, who are the 'star[s] of [his] heart', becoming his lovers as he makes marriage proposals to the actresses' images' and kisses their photographs goodnight.²⁶ The erotic overtones of the song, which was published in a songbook now held in the Imperial War Museum's collection, generate a bawdy humour through references to an actresses' 'beautiful bend behind' and the

²³ Richard Carline, *Pictures in the Post: The Story of the Picture Postcard and Its Place in the History of Popular Art* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1971), p. 66.

²⁴ Veronica Kelly, 'Beauty and the Market: Actress Postcards and Their Senders in Early Twentieth-Century Australia', *New Theatre Quarterly 78*, 20.2 (2004), 99–116.

²⁵ Collection of Twenty Five Songs, (London: Henderson and Spalding, N.D), LBYK.85/3656, Imperial War Museum, London.

²⁶ Ibid.

man's habit of 'gaz[ing] on them nightly with rapturous bliss'.²⁷ Gertie Millar is one of the objects of the bachelor's desire:

Oh, the picture postcard girls

They're as precious as deep-sea pearls

He will gaze with longing sighs, in sweet Gertie Millar's eyes

All his sundry cash he saves the different photos to buy [...]²⁸

It is even possible that it was Martin's portraits of Millar that the song's collector coveted. Martin was complicit in this economy that transformed women into sexual objects, producing photographs of Millar that appealed to the desiring male gaze exemplified by the protagonist of A.J Mills and Bennett Scott's song. The Museum of London album is a record of the collaboration between a photographer and the actress in which they created a profitable image in the form of postcards and in the popular press. Even the more ostensibly 'off duty' images where Millar seems to pose as herself, out of character, she is always performing as Gertie Millar, the actress, the 'picture postcard beauty'. For example, in one of the portraits Millar is depicted in an affectionate moment with her pet dog, Chum [Fig. 100], which communicates the actress's genuineness and enables the fans a propinguity to an imagined off-stage or 'real' Gertie Millar. Her tenderness toward the dog is also designed appeal to the British sentimentalism toward pet animals. She is dressed fashionably, conveying the glamour she was known for, but the dog's head in her lap and her loving gaze down at it connects her to the domestic and the ordinary. The performer is bought closer to her fans through this relatability, deliberately engineered by Martin to heighten her subject's popularity.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

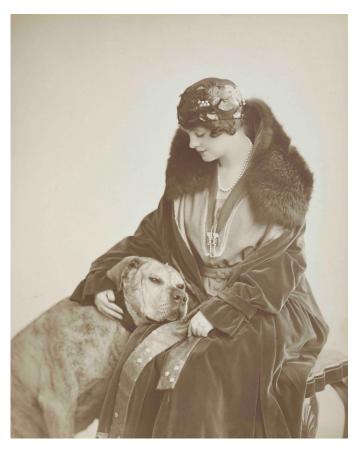


Figure 100: Gertie Millar by Rita Martin, gelatin silver print, c.1917, Museum of London

Millar's loyalty to Martin indicates her preference for the way that the photographer represented her and the productivity and affinity of their working dynamic. We have seen in chapter two how Lallie Charles grew her business on their belief that 'woman, as a rule, prefers to be photographed *by* woman' and it is therefore tempting to deduce that this reasoning was Millar's also.²⁹ It is not possible to make a definitive assertion that Millar chose Martin as her photographer because she was a woman, but the role of gender within this dynamic, I argue, is not incidental, in light of the events that preceded it which will be explained in the next section. Moreover, the longevity and frequency that characterised their working relationship, as well as the affective range that the photographer and the actress were able to produce together, point toward the likelihood that equality and affinity played a major role. The next section reveals the lack of agency that Millar and her fellow female stage performers experienced and how, in light of this reality, the actress's decision to

²⁹ MacKenzie, p. 689.

work with a woman photographer for the remainder of her career can be understood as a politicised decision in which she sought to recuperate agency over her representation.

Gertie Millar

On 28 January 1907 Gertie Millar was in the witness box of the King's Bench Division at the High Court in London being cross examined. Millar (addressed by her married surname 'Monckton' in the court case) had brought a case against the postcard publishers Dunn and Co. for producing faked photographs of her, several of which featured Millar's head on different bodies. A year prior, Ralph Dunn had acquired portraits of Millar taken by the Bassano photographic studio and used them to construct four composite images that he then sold as postcards.³⁰ The first falsely depicted Millar (her head on another woman's body) in a nightdress holding a candle and smiling suggestively into the camera. In the second Millar's head was superimposed on the popular image 'La Source', showing her in a flimsy drapery held up with both hands. Another showed Millar wagging a finger chidingly at a tiny black child, switched from a spider in the original.³¹ And finally, the actress was shown emerging from an eggshell in an 'Easter' scene. Millar reportedly found the images 'indelicate, immodest and vulgar', and took legal action against the publisher for the distress they had caused her personally, and the damage done to her professional reputation.³² She maintained that she would never have posed for such images that reflected badly on her moral character and that they should not have been produced without her consent. At the time of the court case, Millar had worked for George Edwardes at his Gaiety Theatre in the West End for six years and was at the height of her fame.

The 'Monckton Vs Dunn' court case, which was widely reported in the British press, dramatises the deep-rooted hypocrisy of the period's prevailing culture in which

³⁰ Newcastle Daily Chronicle, 30 January 1907, p. 5. I have not been able to reproduce the postcards here because they do not exist in any public collections.

³¹ Coded in the language of the time as a 'piccaninny', a term that denotes a racist caricature of a black child.

³² Hampshire Telegraph, 2 February 1907, p. 4.

demand for, and indulgence in, feminine spectacle went hand in hand with the disenfranchisement of the women who provided it. Dunn and Co.'s actions, and the subsequent verdict that found in their favour, demonstrate the entitlement to women's bodies and regulation of their sexuality that pervaded the broader commercial ecosystem, of which studio photography was an integral part. As she was cross examined in court Millar was observed by her husband, Lionel Monckton, who composed the songs she sang on stage, her manager, George Edwardes, and the photographer she was contracted to at the time, Frank Foulsham (of the firm Foulsham and Banfield). Foulsham was also the head of the Rotary postcard company that regularly published her images. This was an industry where men dictated the terms of women's representation and had large stakes in their objectification. Millar's case exposes the realities faced by women who built careers within this commercial arena, namely the endemic sexist exploitation of their bodies and images.

In the courtroom, as on the stage and on photographic postcards, Gertie Millar became the spectacle, described as the 'leading figure of Mr Justice Darling's Court'. ³³ For the men in the room, it was a day of 'scintillating humour', and the mainstream press revelled in the farcical nature of the proceedings. ³⁴ Throughout the cross examination the lawyer for the defence, Mr Powell, posed derisive questions to the actress designed to confuse her as Darling, a 'populist' judge prone to 'inveterate facetiousness' interjected with quips that stoked the levity. ³⁵ In the absence of laws that protected individuals' images being misused or manipulated to produce a fake scenario, Millar sued the publisher under 'defamation' law, arguing that her reputation had been tarnished by the way she was depicted in the postcards. This claim was easily refuted by the defence who argued that Millar could not prove that she had fallen from public favour as a result of the postcards and that in fact it was the norm for actresses to appear on stage and be photographed wearing intimate apparel, therefore she should have no complaint. Indeed, the first question Powell posed to

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³³ Dundee Evening Telegraph, 30 January 1907, p. 5.

³⁴ Northern Daily Mail, 30 January 1907, p. 10.

³⁵ Neville Laski and G. R. Rubin, *Darling, Charles John, First Baron Darling (1849–1936), Judge* (Oxford University Press. 2010)

https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-32714.

Millar on the stand was 'You were playing last night in Aladdin, I suppose?' Millar confirmed this, to which the lawyer asked, 'You were well received I hope?' Millar answered that yes, she had been well received, a reply that immediately handed the defence proof that her popularity had not been affected as she claimed.³⁶ At this early stage, Powell gained the crucial evidence he needed to win the case for the defendants and therefore used the remainder of his questioning time to flaunt his intellectual prowess and humiliate Millar for the entertainment of the room.³⁷

Powell's subsequent questioning of Millar focused entirely on the way that the actress was represented in the pirated photographs, ignoring the conditions under which they were produced (without her consent and involving a manipulation of her image). In the witness box Millar tried repeatedly to assert Dunn's wrongdoing, stating:

what I object to is having my head put on someone else's body [...] my permission was not asked [...]

I don't wish the public to think that I would be photographed in such an attitude [...]

I want the public to know I did not sit for these photographs.³⁸

Throughout the examination, Powell deflected these statements by directing his questions at the various ways that Millar had allowed herself to be represented in the past, relying on false equivalences and straw man arguments. For example, he referred to the male roles that Millar had performed and posed in (at the time of the hearing she was playing Aladdin), the suggestion being that this gender swapping was potentially deviant or risqué so the notion that the Dunn postcards could injure her reputation could not possibly be legitimate. A composite photograph in which Millar's image was repeated four times was produced as evidence and the jury were reminded of a well-known humorous photograph in which Millar was shown with other actresses

³⁶Sheffield Evening Telegraph, 28 January 1907, p. 5.

³⁷ In his address to the jury Powell stated that 'plaintiff had admitted her popularity had not waned at all, but that when she came on stage she was greeted with rounds of applause. That being so they must judge if the defendants had done her any harm.' *Yorkshire Telegraph and Star*, 29 January 1907, p. 5.

³⁸ *Daily Mail*, 30 January 1907, p. 4.

in a pie to illustrate that she had previously authorised 'made up' images of herself. The false conclusion drawn here is that Millar had consented to manipulated images of herself to be published in the past, so why were the Dunn and Co. postcards any different? The key distinction of course is that Millar had posed for these images and they were published with her authorisation.

Millar was not the only woman whose body was scrutinised during the hearing. Acting as the gatekeeper of respectable femininity, Powell distributed portraits of prominent actresses wearing revealing costumes (in plays that Millar had also performed in, to imply a connection) around the all-male jury, as 'evidence' of the common standards of feminine propriety and bodily display in the entertainment industry. According to the press, as the all-male jury consulted pictures of the actress Gabrielle Ray in her pyjamas, they 'developed a keen interest in "art for art's sake"' and the sexualised display continued with a 'decollete [sic] photograph of Miss Camille Clifford'.³⁹ Moving beyond the realm of representation, Powell laboured his point by instrumentalising the bodies of the women sitting in the court's public benches. He directed Millar's attention (and therefore the court's attention) to women seated in the gallery, many of whom were Millar's colleagues at the Gaiety Theatre, to demonstrate the vogue for low-cut dresses and ask her if she had any objection to this style.⁴⁰

Having anatomised images of Millar and her colleagues and directed the mass scrutiny of the bodies of real women sitting in the courtroom, Powell began firing absurd and arbitrary references at Millar, drawing on an arsenal of celebrated women who had been enshrined in the plastic or dramatic arts in their nightdresses. The plaintiff was asked if she was familiar with a painting of a young Queen Victoria roused from her bed to be told of her accession to the throne. 'That was before my time', she replied.⁴¹ The Shakespearean heroines Juliet, Lady Macbeth and Desdemona, all of whom appear on stage in their nightgowns, were then summoned. Powell asked if Millar objected to playing their parts or being photographed in these roles. She

³⁹ 30 January 1907.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

answered sincerely: 'I don't think I could play Juliet'. 42 Powell also bombarded Millar with references to popular contemporary plays in which women act out entire scenes dressed in nightgowns: had seen them? Would she play those parts? She couldn't recall the plays he refers to but offered, 'if it had been my work, I suppose I should not have objected'. 43 Powell asked Millar whether she had ever seen the Antonio Canova sculpture of Pauline Bonaparte 'in the altogether' (i.e. nude) as Venus Victorious in Rome. By this stage, Powell had stirred the courtroom into a collective state of hilarity that they erupted into laughter every time Millar, unfamiliar with the references that she was asked to respond to, answered in earnest. The purpose of these questions, presumably, was to prove that despite her claims to the contrary, Millar was (or should have been) content being represented in a nightdress or drapery, or even semi-nude: if royalty could be represented in this way, then so could the actress Gertie Millar. However, the references that Powell made – a sculpture in Rome, a painting in the Tate, the plays of Shakespeare – served to shame Millar by presuming a certain level of access to education and culture which the actress, from a poor working-class background, had not had the privilege of receiving. Throughout the questioning, Powell and Darling joked between themselves, revealing their mutual knowledge as highly educated men of the upper-middle class.

While weaponising class difference against Millar, Powell then seized on the performer's professional success and accumulated wealth to cast her as an avaricious woman who would take advantage of the humble working man: 'A lady like you, who receives so much per week, does not wish to take money out of the pocket of the poor postcard seller?'⁴⁴ The classed term 'lady' is employed here to suggest that Millar was in a position of power and should look charitably on the 'poor postcard seller['s]' misdemeanour.

In the final blow to Millar's case Powell entirely stripped her of agency by concluding that the legal action had in fact been bought about by the photographer/publisher that Millar was contracted to (at the time Foulsham and

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ 30 January 1907.

Banfield) who resented being undercut by Dunn's lower quality, cheaper postcards.⁴⁵ The lawyer's assertion framed Millar as a puppet in a dispute between rival male business owners over who got to profit from her image, a theory he elucidated through an analogy of Dunn's tampering: 'the action was very much like the nightdress picture. The head was that of Miss Gertie Millar, but the whole of the nerves and body were those of Mr. Foulsham and the Rotary Publishing Company [...] The whole quarrel was between two firms of photographic postcard dealers'.⁴⁶ The metaphor Powell uses is telling as it affirms the way that the actress in this period was reduced to her image — an entity that could be manipulated for men to make money.

In his summing up Judge Darling commented that if it had been a 'vicar's wife' who had been represented in these scenarios it would be a libel, however, the plaintiff was 'a lady who often appeared before the public in fancy costumes' and therefore no defamation could be proved. Here, the judge made a distinction between women deserving of bodily autonomy; the chaste vicar's wife was granted rights over her own image and body that the actress – a public figure who monetised her appearance – was denied.

Powell, in his summary, appealed to the values of modernity, stating that Millar's objections to the style in which she was represented belonged to the Victorian period. Two ideologies collide in the judge and lawyer's commentary on the case. One is highly conservative, invoking a stratum of femininity in which those that conform to their prescribed gender roles are protected and those who deviate are punished. This shamed Millar on the grounds of a perceived aberrance of respectable femininity due to the public nature of her profession (there is, of course, a long history of actresses being considered on a par with prostitutes). AB Powell, however, took a diametrically opposed strategy of shaming, using the progression of moral values to suggest that Millar was somehow prudish or frigid for being offended about the way she was depicted in the postcards. In this statement he invoked a standard that she should conform to, a diktat for how her body should have been displayed.

⁴⁵ Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 30 January 1907, p. 7.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ 30 January 1907.

⁴⁸ Felski, pp. 19–20.

After being subjected to such a degrading cross examination, it is no wonder that Millar did not stay in the courtroom to hear the verdict, which was returned for the defendants. In an interview with the *Daily Mail* Millar spoke out about the injustice she had endured:

What I fail to see [...] is why these people should be allowed to do as they like with us? Just because you happen to be an actress you are to be treated with much less dignity and regard than if you change to be a district visitor. I noticed his sneer about how much lower in the social scale we are than a vicar's wife.⁴⁹

This quotation reveals in candid terms the way that actresses were exploited and treated with contempt by the industries that profited from their performances. Millar was incredulous at the lack of protection or autonomy that she had within this system, articulating the entitlement that 'these people', broadly denoting the male establishment (Judge Darling) and a misogynistic celebrity culture and the industries and institutions it was buttressed by (Dunn and Co.), had over her body and image. Millar expressed her humiliation and disbelief at the questioning, which left her feeling 'wild with indignation'. ⁵⁰

Millar, in advocating for her own rights, also acted on behalf of her fellow performers to try and reform the exploitative practices of the commercial photographic industry that affected them all:

I am not alone in my views on this matter. Other actresses are equally injured with myself, but I felt it urgent that I should take action. Simply because we are actresses and [...] favourites, our photographs sell, but that is no reason why we should be represented as if we had been taken in nightdresses or other indecorous garb.⁵¹

⁵¹ Ibid.

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⁴⁹ *Daily Mail*, 31 January 1907, p. 5.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

The scandalous handling of Millar's case sent shockwaves around the theatrical community and caused 'panic' among actresses when it became apparent that due to the public nature of their profession, they would not be granted the control over their own images that a 'private citizen' (those compliant with the expectation that women be modest and private) was entitled to.52 'This verdict frightens me' the actress Edna May told The Evening Telegraph and Post, going on to describe her own experience of finding pirated images of herself in shop windows.⁵³ A number of other actresses were asked for comment on the Millar case. Under a headline 'Chorus of Complaint: Pretty Actresses and the Camera' they shared their own experiences and expressed solidarity with Millar. The 'Gibson Girl' Camille Clifford, whose image had been passed around in court, revealed that she knew her 'photograph represented an exceedingly sound business asset' and had taken stringent measures to ensure legal protection.⁵⁴ She was 'heartily sorry' to hear of Millar's case and advised actresses, 'hie you to a lawyer. See that your contract with photographers is properly drawn up'. Doris Beresford, a colleague of Millar's at the Gaiety, expressed the need for a review of the laws around photography and consent: 'Surely the law of libel or some other law ought to protect us'.⁵⁵

The statements of these high-profile performers reveal the challenges and hazards that women who made money from their image faced and how they fought for and exerted agency in an exploitative culture designed to strip them of it. For Millar, her reclamation of agency after the photographic industry and legal system betrayed her was through her performance. Shortly after the court case Millar 'introduced with great success' a new song at the Gaiety called 'My Photographic Girl', which put a comedic spin on the events. In her riposte to the Dunn and Co., their lawyer and the judge, Millar sung about her plan to be photographed 'siting with her darling on a bench', a mocking reference to the courtroom and Judge Darling who presided over the case. ⁵⁶ By transforming the distressing and disempowering ordeal

⁵² The Evening Telegraph and Post, 31 January 1907, pp. 2, 4 (p. 2).

⁵³ 31 January 1907, p. 4.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ihid

⁵⁶ Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette, 21 February 1907, p. 8.

into a musical comedy skit, sending up the judge who had shamed and taunted her,
Millar rewrote the narrative on her own terms.

Millar's reaction to her failed lawsuit and misogynistic treatment with the comedic song demonstrates the nature of her character as she refused to be victimised and creatively exercised the power that she was afforded. It was around the time of the faked Dunn photographs and the ensuing court case that Millar began to work with Martin. The first image in the Museum of London album [Fig. 85] dates from between 1906 – 1909 and does not seem to correspond to any particular theatrical production. The actress appears youthful and chaste, depicted reading a book with her hair loose and wearing what appears to be a type of nightdress. ⁵⁷ Millar's representation in this attire by Martin is of particular significance given that being falsely represented in a nightdress by Dunn and Co. was a major part of the actress's grievance. This picturing of Millar seems to serve a purifying function, restoring her public image back to one of respectability.

After a series of lacklustre performances and brief stint on Broadway in 1908, Millar's big comeback on the London stage in 1909 was in the title role of 'Our Miss Gibbs', and she sat for Martin in costume. The Museum of London album indicates that Martin and Millar worked together sometime before this between 1906 – 1909. It is not possible to know how much power Millar had in terms of brokering the photographic contract with Martin as George Edwardes was notoriously controlling over his female employees. However, it is highly likely that the image fraud would have damaged the actress's trust in photographers and publishers; in light of this and her strongly worded press statements in reaction to the verdict, her choice of a woman photographer takes on a politicised significance. Posing for Martin in her nightdress [Fig. 85] and on a bench [Fig. 101] read as deliberately coded references to the crime perpetrated against her and humiliating trial that ensued, the resulting

⁵⁷ Lucile, famed for her elegant undergarments and diaphanous sheer dresses that resembled night wear, designed Millar's costumes at this time.

⁵⁸ Gänzl.

⁵⁹ Peter Bailey, "Naughty but Nice": Musical Comedy and the Rhetoric of the Girl, 1892 - 1914", in *The Edwardian Theatre: Essays on Performance and the Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 36–60 (p. 39.).

⁶⁰ Even if Edwardes was solely responsible for the choice of Martin as Millar's photographer on purely mercenary grounds, the actress continued to work with Martin after Edwardes died. Gänzl.

portraits designed to reclaim her reputation and image. The next section pivots to consider Martin's own agency as Lallie Charles's assistant and model and how this could have impacted her collaboration with Millar.



Figure 101: Gertie Millar (in 'The Quaker Girl') by Rita Martin, gelatin silver print, 1909, Museum of London

Rita Martin: on both sides of the camera

Rita Martin was twenty-one when she began her photographic career, working as an assistant to her sister Lallie Charles who had set up a photographic studio near Regents Park in London in 1896. As considered in chapter five, during the early years of the business while Charles was growing her reputation, she produced photographic studies, often described as 'fancy pictures', to illustrate short stories or accompany features in popular illustrated periodicals. Rita Martin and her younger sister Isabella modelled for a number of these tableaux, acting out narratives and staging demonstrations. In 1903 Cassell's Magazine reported that Martin was 'perhaps the most photographed lady in the kingdom, for she is an adept at posing and is her sister's model for all sorts of studies'. 61 Martin performed a wide variety of roles for her sister, including modelling hats and dresses in photographic 'fashion pictures', a new mode of advertising that would replace the illustrated fashion plate of the Victorian period. This remarkable aspect of Martin's career – working on both sides of the camera – makes her particularly unique within the history of photography, yet it has remained hidden. Martin is not credited as the model in the photographs in which she appeared, now extant only in reproduction, and the fact that she did this work was only acknowledged briefly in a small number of early interviews with Lallie Charles. Through a survey of early photographs by Charles it has been possible for me to identify Martin as the model in numerous photographic illustrations made by her sister in this period. In the examples below Martin performs a variety of parts. She waits for her lover at a window [Fig. 102], is cast as a country girl, collecting a harvest of apples [Fig. 103], irons linens as a maid [Fig. 104], appears as an ingenue in a detective story [Fig. 105] and appears draped as a classical study [Fig. 106].

⁶¹ 'Notable Women Photographers', Cassell's Magazine, 1903, pp. 437–42 (p. 441).



Figure 102: 'When will he be here?' by Lallie Charles, published in The Royal Magazine 1899.



Figure 103: 'In the Orchard' by Lallie Charles, published in The Royal Magazine 1899.



Figure 104: 'Washing Day' by Lallie Charles, published in The Royal Magazine 1899.



Figure 105: Photo by Lallie Charles to illustrate 'The Mystery of Pearl Crescent' by May Phillips, The Lady's Realm, 1900.



Figure 106: 'Innocence' by Lallie Charles, published in The Royal Magazine, 1899.

The photographs that Charles produced of her sister(s) often have romantic or erotic overtones and they typically foreground their youth and desirability. Charles was a shrewd businesswoman and likely knew that the sexual appeal of her youthful sisters was an asset that could be monetised. She was also a forceful, even 'temperamental', personality and maintained a strict hierarchy within the business, asserting her role as the artistic director with Martin relegated to assistant, which we will explore in depth further on in this chapter.⁶² On a domestic level, the sisters had emigrated from Ireland to work with (or for) Charles in London, therefore, having no family in England, it is likely that the younger Martin sisters were financially dependent on their older, married, sibling.⁶³ Within this context, there are grounds to speculate about the extent

⁶² Beaton and Buckland, p. 270..

⁶³ I have not been able to locate any records pertaining to Charles's first marriage or divorce to Georges Garet-Charles. He was born in 1851 in France and came to England as a widower with his two children in the 1880s to work as a basket maker. *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1891*; The National Archives of the UK (TNA); Kew, Surrey, England; Class: *RG12*; Piece: *2425*; Folio: *119*; Page: *12*; GSU roll: *6097535* At some point in the 1890s he became a photographer and worked from his home at Acacia Road in London (a ten-minute walk from Lallie Charles's studio on Titchfield Road). *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1901*. Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives, 1901. Class: *RG13*; Piece: *118*; Folio: *81*; Page: *34. UK, City and County Directories, 1766 - 1946,* Ancestry.com. *UK, City and County Directories,*

of Martin's power. It certainly appears that as a photographic worker in the business Martin's time and labour belonged to her sister and as a model, Martin's image belonged to her too. Under the published images of Martin there is typically a caption that projects the protagonist's thoughts such as 'When will he be here?'. In these 'fancy pictures', Martin was an anonymous woman, a beautiful blank canvas onto which all manner of feminine roles and fantasies could be projected.

In light of these findings, we might draw a connection between the careers of Rita Martin and Gertie Millar that provides an explanation for their long-standing collaboration. Martin knew personally how it felt to perform for the camera as a model, to have her body commodified and, ultimately, experienced the inevitable loss of control over her image as it entered and circulated within the public sphere. Albeit on different scales, both women's bodies were instrumentalised by others and used to seduce and entertain audiences within the immense commercial machine of early twentieth century mass culture. Charles profited from Martin's desirability, just as George Edwardes, Millar's theatre manager, profited from hers. Both women had also experienced the limitations of their agency within the commercial photographic industry: Millar at the hands of Dunn and Co. and Martin at the hands of her older sister, 'Madame Lallie Garet-Charles', the famous 'lady photographer'.

It is possible that Martin's success with female performers of the era more broadly was due to her lived experience of working in front of the camera, experience that enabled her to empathise with the women that she was representing and to direct them into flattering poses by exercising a kind of muscle memory: she had, after all, performed them with her own body.⁶⁴ I propose that in the case of Millar, the affinity with Martin ran deeper in the sense that their paths crossed at a time when they were both pushing at the limits of their agency, seeking to reclaim or even

^{1766 - 1946 [}database on-line]. Charles was publishing her work under 'Lallie Garet-Charles' from December 1896, in the year that her studio was set up (*The Windsor magazine: an illustrated monthly for men and women*; Dec 1896; 5, British Periodicals, p. 164). It is possible that it was a 'common law' marriage whereby Lallie took Georges's name, but it was not legally bound. Professionally she capitalised on the exoticism of a claim to French heritage (titling herself 'Madame Lallie Garet-Charles', later dropping the 'Garet'). In 1905 she married Herbert Carr and in 1907 Georges Garet-Charles also remarried.

⁶⁴ According to Cecil Beaton, Lily Elsie considered Martin a 'friend' and was photographed by her when she returned to the stage after her marriage in 1911. Beaton, 'Lovely Lily Elsie', p. 10. Other popular actresses repeatedly photographed by Martin include Gladys Cooper and Lily Brayton.

redefine their professional identities. The actress was reclaiming, and restoring integrity to, her image; the photographer was reclaiming her artistic autonomy with her own studio, finally able to credit her labour with her own name. Below I examine in more detail the dynamics between Martin and Charles and how Martin's representation during in her own lifetime impacts on the how she has been, and can be, historicised.

After opening her studio on Baker Street in 1906 Martin became household name. ⁶⁵ Her photographs populated the mainstream press who lauded her work, yet she did not give interviews and there is no evidence of her engaging in the world of celebrity that she portrayed, unlike Charles. ⁶⁶ Her archive, which was donated by the sisters' niece to the National Portrait Gallery in 1994 does not include any documentation that would provide insight into her professional or personal life. Martin's artistic and commercial vision, therefore, can only be traced through her portraits, her presence captured fleetingly in magazine interviews with her sister. In the previous chapter I used these as sources to plot Charles's role in early twentieth century celebrity culture; I return to them now in order to trace Martin's professional identity and understand the nature of the sisters' working dynamic.

As chapters two and five explored, Lallie Charles was a skilled self-promoter. She cultivated her reputation as a leading 'lady' photographer by marketing her feminine sensibilities and representing herself first and foremost as an artist who rejected photographic commercialism.⁶⁷ The mythology of the artist is, of course, one of individual rather than collective genius, and a cult of personality existed around Charles in the popular press. She was charming, witty and put people at their ease; journalists applauded her character. But Charles was not running her studio alone and it becomes clear when reading between the lines in articles about her career that Martin was integral to the operation of the studio. The distinct photographic style that in the previous chapter I discussed in depth as Charles's, was in fact simultaneously Martin's. It is therefore unsurprising that it is difficult to tell the sisters' work apart

65 'My Most Beautiful Photograph', *The Strand Magazine*, 1910, 1–9.

⁶⁶ Photographs in NPG collection by 'Miss Compton Collier' where Lallie Charles is depicted in the garden of a grand house with the actress Ida Adams, actor Sir Charles Blake Cochran and the impresario Raymond Hitchcock [NPG x68995; NPG x68997]

⁶⁷ 'Photography as a Profession for Women: A Chat with Madame Garet-Charles', p. 416.

after Martin opened her own studio; the lighting, the poses, the backgrounds, the props and the tendency toward artful (and substantial) retouching make them difficult to distinguish. The sisterly rivalry is particularly apparent on the many magazine pages in which the sisters' portraits compete side by side. In terms of the sisters' shared studio practice is not possible for us to extricate who made creative decisions, or what ratio of photographs authored 'Lallie Charles' were in fact taken by Rita Martin, but what we do know is that every time a sitter walked into their studio, the sisters were honing their process, refining the style that made their work so recognisable and coveted, *together*.

When Charles was asked by an interviewer about her 'special methods' in 1897, she referenced 'certain technical tips known only to [her] and her sister', which evokes a kind of secret, sororal language. However, despite this indication of the symbiotic nature of their work together, Martin was never granted an equal status in the business. On the 1901 census return Charles is recorded as an 'employer' with Martin recorded as her 'worker'. His hierarchy can be compared to the photographic partnership of Kate Pragnell and Alice Stewart explored in chapter three, who, on the 1901 census were both recorded as working on their 'own account', as equals. Furthermore, Martin was described by Charles as an invaluable assistant and even her 'right hand man' yet she was not granted a voice in interviews.

When journalists visited Charles's studio Martin was glimpsed, ready to receive a sitter in the studio or introduced politely over tea once a tour was completed and Charles had finished fabricating her artistic mythology, but she never stayed long. A reporter for *The Lady's Realm* visited the Regent's Park studio in 1899 and described being welcomed into the cosy residence: 'when the studio is ready, you have but to step into the next room, where Madame Lallie Charles and her sister are awaiting you'. ⁷¹ It is significant that Martin is not named here but is described in relational terms to Charles, who is the subject of the feature. Similarly, in an 1899 interview with *The Young Woman* magazine Martin is glimpsed as follows: 'Madame Garet-Charles,

⁶⁸ MacKenzie, p. 690.

⁶⁹ Census Returns of England and Wales, 1901. Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives, 1901. Class: RG13; Piece: 117; Folio: 134; Page: 18.

⁷⁰ MacKenzie, p. 690.

⁷¹ 'Madame Lallie Charles's Portraits', p. 42.

who has her clever sister, Miss Rita Martin, with her, has photographed hundreds of the best-known women in society, including nearly all the most eminent actresses'. The phrasing of this fleeting reference to Martin is revealing; she is parenthetical, introduced in a dependent clause. To say that Charles has Martin with her, makes Charles the possessor, the dominant party. Clearly Martin was there with Charles, but she is not explained or credited in her own right, as it is Charles, singular, who has photographed the most eminent actresses, even though this was a joint achievement. This raises the question: why was the nature of Martin's role at the studio illegible to the reporter? And why, suddenly, at a late stage in the article, are we told that Charles has Martin 'with her'? Had she been there all along? The fact that she is being introduced at all indicates she is of importance but the rule for most articles on Charles is that Martin appears, her work in the studio acknowledged, often in the last page or paragraph, but is quickly glossed over.

The Penny Pictorial ran a feature on the 'Lady Artist of the Camera' Lallie Charles in 1899 and in this interview, Martin has a more sustained presence. Typically, mention of Rita and the younger Martin sister Isabella, comes late in the interview when the journalist Angus McDonald is invited for tea and the sisters show him a selection of photographs in which they are models. The reporter is captivated by the sisters' 'charms' and zealously describes the pictures in which Martin appears 'delightfully merry', 'dainty' and 'angelic'. ⁷³ After he finishes rhapsodising on the sisters' modelling work, he mentions that 'Miss Rita is not only admirable as a model; she assists her sister greatly in the studio, is a most wonderful re-toucher, and sometimes takes pictures herself'. ⁷⁴ The way that McDonald presents Martin's role in photographic enterprise, is first and foremost as a model and then as a technical assistant to Charles or even a kind of apprentice.

⁷² 'Photography as a Profession for Women: A Chat with Madame Garet-Charles', p. 416.

⁷³ McDonald, p. 437.

⁷⁴ McDonald, p. 440.



Figure 107: Lallie Charles and Rita Martin, published in The Lady's World, 1903.

The above portrait of Charles and Martin together accompanied a feature titled 'Madame Lallie Charles' in *The Lady's World* in 1903. The portrait takes up a full page and is three-quarter length and although uncredited, is in keeping with the sisters' studio style and was almost undoubtedly produced by them. The way that Charles and Martin are depicted provides visual evidence of the power dynamic – professional and personal – or at least how Charles wanted it portrayed. On the left of the portrait, Charles wears an elaborate, richly textured and patterned lace dress with a neckline that sweeps dramatically across her chest, sitting low on the shoulders to expose her alabaster skin. She is tightly corseted to produce a dramatic feminine silhouette that emphasises her bust, small waist and rounded hips. The photographer is adorned – decorated, even – with a brooch of stars pinned to her dress, on her right-hand side she wears another brooch that has a medal or pendant hanging from it. Her hair is

voluminous, piled high on her head. Around her neck she wears a long chain of turquoises, which the accompanying article explains are her lucky charm. The author quips that celebrated authors Dickens and Ibsen also kept talismans and in doing so, places Charles alongside these luminaries.⁷⁵

In terms of pose, Charles is commanding, standing very upright, chest forward, shoulders back in a statuesque attitude. Her body faces towards Martin's, a maternal arm around her shoulder. But her face is turned away; Charles looks out of the portrait, her swanlike neck extended to tilt the chin slightly upward, eyes wide and fixed as if caught by something on the horizon. Depicted in the act of looking beyond the photographic frame the pose stages her 'vision', in the sense of ambition; she is broadening her horizons. Indeed, the text of the article lauds Charles's imagination. Mystery and romanticism are communicated through her gaze, the stately elegance of her pose, and the auspicious turquoises prominently displayed.

Martin is visibly much smaller in stature than her older sister. She is posed with her arms behind her back, which has the effect of making her seem submissive as if assembled, waiting to be given an order, which perhaps she is. Her dress, although fashionably gathered at the bust and sleeves, is much plainer than Charles's darker, embellished gown and is entirely without ornament. Her body moulds to her sister's: note how her shoulder is tucked under Charles's arm. Martin's face is turned in profile and our view of her features and facial expression are limited by this positioning. She appears to look directly in front of her, likely at something beyond to the left of the frame, but because Charles is in between Martin and the side of the frame it looks as if she may have a very shallow gaze, eyes fixed adoringly on her sister. Moreover, her head, positioned in this way to face in towards Charles, serves to marshal our attention to Charles's face with its open, dynamic expression. We know that Martin was experienced in posing for photographs but here there is a notable stiffness to her pose; her lips even appear slightly pursed. Charles, on the contrary, looks entirely at ease, posing as the romantic artist.

The analysis of interviews and the double portrait above, demonstrate how Martin was pushed to the side, given cursory attention, seen but not heard and

⁷⁵ 'Madame Lallie Charles', p. 1057.

ultimately eclipsed by her older sibling. Yet despite Lallie Charles's superiority within the sisters' working relationship, she evidently depended heavily on Martin.

Charles and Martin became competitors when Martin started her own enterprise in 1906, a decision which likely precipitated the enmity that, according to Cecil Beaton, drove the sisters apart personally. 76 This certainly tallies with archival documentation: Charles did not remember Martin in her Will.⁷⁷ Although the sisters themselves were estranged, their photographic work did, however, reunite after Charles's death when her studio was merged with Martin's as she took over the goodwill of the business. 78 According to her pupil and employee Yevonde, Charles's heyday was beginning to wane by 1912. Yevonde wrote that Charles's style had become outmoded; clients were not happy with their proofs, disliked the lack of variety in the poses and complained about the artificial quality. 79 The photographer's nostalgic portraits of the landed elite ensured her popularity whilst they clung to power, but the First World War was a final blow to the supremacy of the ruling class and Charles was not able to diversify her client base. 80 Yevonde recalled that it seemed 'there was no one left to photograph'.81 In 1913 Charles moved to another studio on Curzon Street and acquired large debts during the renovation process that she was unable to repay due to loss of business. Two years later her affairs were settled in bankruptcy court. 82 Charles's health began to decline around this time and she died in 1919.

When Martin first started out on her own her pictures were indistinguishable from her sister's, but her style subtly modernised and became a distinctive part of early twentieth century visual culture, ensuring that her career flourished into the 1920s. In chapter five we saw that Society women were the focus of press attention as the mass media proliferated towards the end of the nineteenth century and the portraits produced by Charles pictured this genteel feminine ideal par excellence.

⁷⁶ Beaton and Buckland, p. 270.

⁷⁷ Lallie Charles Last Will and Testament, 25 March 1919, Obtained via UK Government Probate Search Service: https://probatesearch.service.gov.uk/Wills [Accessed 4 March 2021].

^{78 &#}x27;Lallie Charles', Daily Mail (London, England, 25 March 1920), p. 5.

⁷⁹ Yevonde, p. 68.

⁸⁰ Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p. 37.14/11/2021 19:37:00

⁸¹ Yevonde, p. 68.

⁸² Westminster Gazette, 26 October 1915, p. 8.

However, over the next twenty years as British society became more mobile and commercial culture transformed the social landscape, new opportunities and identities emerged. As a result of these shifts, the actress began to rival the privileged society lady as the dominant model of celebrity femininity that captured the public imagination in the early twentieth century. The leading female performers of the Edwardian stage were the precursors of the Anglo-American 'star system'. Martin specialised in photographing actresses and therefore cannily built her reputation within a rapidly expanding industry, a decision that ensured the longevity of her career.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the complex dynamics of women's representation of women. Structurally it could be visualised as a mise-en-abyme, an image within an image: Martin transformed Millar into a consumable image, just as she had been transformed into one by her older sister. The chapter has wrangled with the question of who holds the power in the staging of a portrait, when both photographer and subject are caught within the 'predicament of femininity', to link back to Griselda Pollock's concept.⁸³ We have seen the misogyny that women who traded on their image in the Edwardian period endured, the presiding logic being that if a woman made her living through public performance, then her image and her body were public property.

I have argued that Millar returned to Martin's studio because she regained control of her image within that dynamic, and that the affinity between these women existed because of the exceptional conditions of Martin's own career. There was an equality and an empathic aspect to their relationship: like her subject, the photographer's body and sexuality had been commodified. Martin's position within her sister's business was also one of curtailed agency. Martin and Millar's collaboration provides a compelling example of how different women's expressions of agency could look in this period and how they mutually benefitted from working together. Through their repeated encounters in the photographic studio Millar was able to define on her

⁸³ Pollock, Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desires and the Writing of Art's Histories, p. 33.

own terms a profitable public image, and Martin expertly produced it, establishing herself as the leading photographer of much-loved celebrities. There are numerous other female performers that Martin developed enduring professional relationships with during her career: Lily Elsie and Gladys Cooper to name just two. As the twentieth century advanced, women were granted more rights and freedoms (although still very little) and their decisions over who represented them were either subtly or explicitly politicised. Modern female subjectivity was not only defined by engaging in political struggle that we saw in chapter four, but it included women like Gertie Millar, who performed imaginative possibilities for women, showing that they did not have to be defined solely as wife or mother. As the refrain of the second wave feminist movement goes, 'the personal is political'; Gertie Millar's court action, her song about the experience and subsequent decision to be portrayed by Martin were her displays of resistance.

Conclusion

Through a recuperation of women's practice of studio portraiture in Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century this thesis argues for a feminist social history of photography. It has interpreted and synthesised archival materials that have been overlooked within the discipline until now and used an interdisciplinary framework to reconstruct the social, political, economic and cultural conditions of women's commercial photographic production. I have built this picture through information provided by portraits themselves, in their visual coding, as well as fragments of knowledge gleaned from the textual sources that they were situated within. This method has enabled me to illuminate the discourses of femininity – whether retrograde or progressive – that the portraits contributed to and the private and public purposes that they served.

A major finding of the thesis is the tension between the demands of commerce and the struggle for women's social progress that existed within women's professionalised practice of photography in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. These were antagonistic forces: commerce demanded competition, whereas the advancement of women required collaboration; the market required one to narrow oneself into a niche or a specialism and to serve the status quo, whereas political efforts toward women's advancement necessitated an expansive imagining of alternatives. This thesis has tracked moments of friction where the imperative for personal gain dictated by the capitalist market was interrupted, resisted by women like Catherine Weed Ward, Kate Pragnell and Alice Stewart as well as the many examples of women photographers sharing their resources, skills, privileges and power within the suffrage campaign. The divergent ideologies and temporalities of stability and progress were negotiated by these women. On one hand women photographers had to attend to the essential, immediate need to make money and achieve economic security that furnished them with their independence in the present. On the other they had to keep an eye on the horizon, working towards social change on a much lengthier continuum through the

movement for women's equality. The need for stability *and* progress could not easily be reconciled. For example, Kate Pragnell and Alice Stewart colluded in the archaic rituals of the upper-class marriage market – a system that fundamentally disempowered women – while staunchly employing only women, serving as providers of opportunity and independence. What the photographers may have taken away, they then gave back in the form of giving women options. If Pragnell had lived longer, perhaps she and Stewart would have set up their network of photographic studios run by women.

The tension between the individual and collective advancement of women afforded by photography constitutes another important faultline. Lallie Charles zealously conformed to a feminine ideal in her professional self-fashioning and in her representation of women, a strategy that granted her personal progress but arguably stymied women's collective social progress. She enjoyed a glittering career and lived a life of freedom and independence through the manufacture of artificial feminine beauty that upheld divisions between women on the grounds of class. As we saw in chapter six, Charles capitalised on the youth and beauty of her younger sister and maintained a hierarchy within their professional relationship. Yet the fact that Charles blazed a trail for other women in the photographic industry is exemplified by her protégé Yevonde Cumbers, who styled herself in her tutor's image as 'Madame Yevonde' and undoubtedly went on to inspire so many women to become professional photographers.

I have argued that women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century often chose to be photographed by a woman because the gendered dynamic enabled a mutuality, an equality that granted the female sitter agency. As we saw in chapter two with Annie Mackenzie's account of a male photographer ('How one hates the man!'), women felt more empowered personally within the female-run studio. In chapter four I considered how suffrage activists exercised political agency through their choice to commission a woman to take their portrait. In the case of Rita Martin, I have suggested that this perceived gendered equality was heightened as she was a photographer whose image (and sexuality) had been commodified like the performers she represented. The lack of sitter's perspectives is an inevitable limitation of this thesis. I would have liked to have been able to draw stronger conclusions about customers'

perceptions of 'lady' photographers and the role of gender within their choice of photographer, but without existing first-hand testimonies from sitters this was not possible. My evidence came from women's decisions to return to a woman photographer to mark the important moments in their lives, or, in the case of women who earned their own living, their decision to return to a woman photographer throughout their career.

In terms of areas of research that could be explored further, the thesis has focused on the production of studio portraiture for the most part, and more work remains to be done on the consumption of portraits, including the feminine cultures around postcard collecting and how the domestic space became politicised through the display of portraits of suffrage activists, for example. The time period that I focused on in the thesis necessarily contracted from a proposed period of 1890 – 1960 to a much narrower time frame that would enable an in-depth investigation of women and the practice of studio portraiture in Britain. The innovations that women made in studio practice from 1914 onwards and during the interwar years would make a fascinating study. I have looked at photographers who worked in England's capital city, but there is great potential for a study of regional photographic studios run by women as well as comparative investigations between women's photography in Britain and overseas, in particular North America where women made advances in the industry much earlier.

I want to close the thesis by coming full circle with a photograph that I used in the proposal for this research [Fig. 108]. Pictured are Olive Edis (née Legat) and her twin sisters Katherine and Emmeline Legat who immortalise themselves here as 'The Three Graces'. The photograph was taken at a moment before Olive Edis and Katherine Legat established their studio in Sheringham in 1905, and although I decided not to focus on this partnership in the thesis, this portrait felt like it guided the project, or acted as a talisman of sorts.

The women's hands, a symbol of industry, are the focal point of the photograph. Central to the composition are Edis's crossed wrists forming an 'X' – pale against the dark dress and bought into relief, fixing our gaze here. The hands in this image are given an even sharper focus than the faces. Mirroring each other, the twins' free hands curve in sympathy. Perhaps we are meant to pay attention to the hands in this image, because not one, but two pairs of hands pictured are the makers of this

photograph — Olive and Katherine, in their joint photographic endeavour. Through the focus on interlinked hands, the portrait seems to serve as an allegory of shared labour. But more than that, the chain formed by the sisters' hands is, to me, an allegory for the shared, collective project of feminist historical recuperation: the passing on of knowledge, and the acknowledgement of one's part in a lineage extending from the feminist scholars in the past to those in the future.

This is also a photograph that represents a beginning, both for the women in the photograph, who were about to embark on a shared venture as professional photographers, and for me personally as I commenced my research. I reproduce it here because, although this is the final page, I want this study to mark the beginning of a sustained, in-depth scholarly enquiry into women's commercial practice of photography in Britain, and a reassessment of the value systems that allowed images like this to languish in obscurity for so long.



Figure 108: The Three Graces by Olive Edis and Katherine Legat, photograph, c. 1903, National Portrait Gallery, London.

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