

Splish Splash, Splish Splash: Concepts of Hygiene in Women's Prescriptive Literature Making of the Middle Class

Anna Lacy

Richard Stockton College of New Jersey

On March 1, 1808, William and Rebecca Porter of Middleboro, Massachusetts gave birth to a son named James. As a child he attended Pierce Academy and Kent's Hill Academy. At the age of nineteen, Porter reached a formative moment in his young adulthood as he converted to join the Methodist church. By the 1840s, Porter had risen to prominence as a member of the New England Conference of the United Methodist Church with pastorate appointments in Lynn, Worcester, and Boston, Massachusetts. Aside from his duties as a pastor, Porter was an accomplished author publishing both religious texts such as *The Compendium of Methodism*, *The Winning Worker*, and *Helps to Officers of the Church*, and advice guides (Harmon 579-580).

As the author of the conduct guide, *Hints to Young Ladies*, Porter is significant for several reasons. First, Porter's geographic situation and proximity to the Boston publishing market is important because this essay examines early nineteenth century urbanization and the expansion of the book industry in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic. Changing demographic patterns as Americans moved to urban areas renewed debates over how one should fashion their appearance as a marker of socioeconomic status. Because this essay draws from prescriptive literature, it is also important to trace the growth of the book industry to understand where these works were published and distributed. In addition to locale, the content of Porter's guide is equally important. For instance, in *Hints to Young Ladies*, Porter offered his readers the following advice:

Frequent ablutions are of the greatest importance. As in sickness, good nursing is often more useful,

medicine, so in health, and under slight affections, frequent washings, combing the hair, cleaning the teeth and nails, contribute as much to health and vigor, as food, and sometimes even more (Porter 93).

Porter's advice typified the ideas about hygiene and appearance recommended in nineteenth-century prescriptive literature. Promoting ideas about personal hygiene and ideas about body presentation, prescriptive literature emphasized class differences in nineteenth-century America. In the second portion, this essay addresses examines early nineteenth-century prescriptive literature in terms of its recommendations regarding bathing, skin care, dental care, and hairstyles, to understand how it highlighted differences based on class and gender, and contributed to the making of the middle class.

Methodology

Ultimately, this project examines fifty-five advice guides published between 1790 and 1850 in the United States. Using qualitative analysis, it uncovers how advice literature encouraged middle-class women to present themselves. Although these ideas about appearance and behavior are at the core of the project, numbers are important too. In order to determine which behaviors and ideas about body presentation prescriptive literature deemed important, I carefully tracked how many guides addressed particular topics. The chart included at the end of this essay offers an overview of this data.

Ultimately, the main purpose of prescriptive literature was to establish social order and promote a specific social hierarchy. Directed towards a primarily white, middle-class audience, early nineteenth century prescriptive literature provided explicit guidelines for proper behavior and helped to define gender roles for the emerging middle class. Conduct literature stressed ideas about how a middle-class American woman should fashion her appearance by offering recommendations concerning issues such as bathing, dress, and hair care. These ideas served as visual markers of class and allowed women to pronounce their socioeconomic status.

Urbanization and the Book Industry

Between 1820 and 1860, urbanization in the United States occurred at the fastest rate of any

period in American history. While the national population increased 226 percent during this period, the number of people living in urban areas surged 797 percent. Moreover, the number of American cities with populations exceeding ten thousand residents increased more than eightfold between 1820 and 1860 (Halttunen 35). Coinciding with shifting population demographics, “new modes of speech, dress, body carriage, and manners” gave “an entirely new cast to the conduct and appearance of the American gentry” and resulted in the emergence of polite society, a term denoting the etiquette and manners of the upper and middle class (Bushman xii). Urbanization drastically altered patterns of social organization in the United States, as more Americans resided in urban areas where they knew little about their neighbors. Prior to the surge in urban populations, most Americans residing in urban areas knew their neighbors well. However, shifting demographic patterns pushed the issue of urban anonymity into the mix as more Americans entered a world of strangers, where they knew little about their neighbors. Thus, people “were coded largely on the basis of personal appearance” and judged by “costume manner, body markings, and linguistic patterns” (Halttunen 34). Prescriptive literature dealt with this issue of appearance, offering recommendations about how middle-class women should not only conduct themselves in public, but also present their bodies.

Because this paper deals with ideas about appearance and presentation in prescriptive literature, it is necessary to consider the development of the print industry in early-nineteenth century America. While the nineteenth century marked an important turning point in terms of urban development, the print industry also underwent a period of profound change as the number of publishing houses and number of books printed in the United States surged. John Tebbel, author of *A History of Book Publishing in the United States*, notes: “In 1755, there had been only fifty printing offices in the colonies; in 1856, there were about 385 publishing houses. Between 1830 and 1842, before the great leap forward of mass distribution, an average of about a hundred books a year had come from presses in America. This figure increased to 879 in 1853” (Tebbel 221). Moreover, it is necessary to recognize the regional distribution of the book industry, which was predominantly

concentrated in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic. An 1804 catalogue from the American Company of Booksellers illustrates this distribution with the following breakdown of books printed in the United States: New England (Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire) 45 %, New York 20%, Philadelphia 29%, South (Maryland and Virginia) 3%, and non-specified 3% (Gross and Kelley 95). By the 1840s, the publishing industry had expanded south and westward. The following table includes data about the printing industries for seven cities in the United States.

Table 1. Number of Printing Offices and Publishers in the United States in 1840

City	# of Printing Offices	# of Publishers
New York	113	32
Philadelphia	47	24
Cincinnati	32	11
Boston/Cambridge	38	24
New Orleans	18	2
Baltimore	19	7
Washington, D.C.	12	1

Source: *Statistics of the United States...Sixth Census* (Washington, D.C., 1841), in Robert Gross and Mary Kelley, *A History of the Book in America*, 120.

These numbers are significant when examining conduct literature because they relate to the geographic distribution of readership of prescriptive literature, which was largely concentrated in the urban areas of the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast (Hemphill 5). In terms of the fifty-five advice guides used for this project, their publication locations reflected this trend. For the vast majority of the works analyzed, the texts were published and distributed in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast. The following table includes data pertaining to the cities where these guides were published.

Table 2. Publication Location

Place of Publication	Number of Guides Printed
Boston and surrounding area	18
New York and surrounding area	13

Philadelphia	11
United Kingdom	7
Baltimore	3
New Hampshire (Nashua and Portsmouth)	2
Not Listed	1

Source: Data adapted from prescriptive guides used for this project.

*A complete listing of sources is provided in the bibliography.

The Emergence of the Middle Class

As increasing numbers of Americans moved from rural to urban areas, the issue body presentation emerged as a marker of one's socioeconomic class. Nineteenth-century prescriptive literature provided advice about personal hygiene geared not only toward upper class readers, but also for the emerging middle class. The objective was to provide a standard for "controlling the body and achieving a graceful, civilized demeanor" (Brown 119). Cleanliness served as a mechanism for social mobility marking a clear distinction between the working and middle class. On one hand, conduct literature implied the potential for upward mobility and "that all Americans could become ladies and gentlemen, if only they learned the proper behavior" (Brown 119). On the other hand, conduct literature solidified class distinctions, especially those between the working and middle class. It is important to note that the authors of these guides did not exclusively address the wealthy. Instead, they addressed a broader population segment. As a whole, conduct literature principally focused on both the middle and upper class, without providing different models of behavior for either class (Hemphill 134).

When examining the issue of class in relation to prescriptive literature, one must consider the role of printed word in nineteenth-century America. Those studying the history of the book note the occurrence of a "reading revolution" in the nineteenth century as literacy rates increased and the amount of printed material available surged. Mary Kelley describes these changes noting that, "print constituted a ubiquitous presence in everyday life" (Gross and Kelley 524). Yet, Kelley acknowledges that people did not uniformly experience printed materials in the same way. She

explains this difference writing: "individuals and groups, not to mention entire regions, differed in their exposure to and involvement with print culture (Gross and Kelley 524). Literacy rates varied by region and regions like the south and west had considerably higher illiteracy rates. The 1840 census marked one of the first attempts to access literacy rates in the United States. The study on literacy in the census did not account for slaves. According to census data, "Above the Mason-Dixon line and east of the Appalachians, few people, no more than five or six in a hundred, lacked the skill...For the South as a whole, the literacy rate was 20 percent, compared to 8.5 percent for the entire nation" (Gross and Kelley 525).

While this data provides a window into literacy in early America, it is by no means a comprehensive view. Definitions of literacy varied from being able to read and write one's name to a more involved definition like having the ability to comprehend legal documents like wills and deeds and read the Bible. Typically the ability to read was drawn along racial and class lines, with racial and ethnic minorities and members of the lower class having higher rates of illiteracy. Class and literacy rates are crucial to understanding the role of prescriptive literature, which primary addressed those who were highly literate. Conduct guides present multiple indicators as to what was the intended readership. In Cathy Davidson's *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*, she presents a technique for accessing audience. In particular, Davidson remarks: "Prefatory material or any other such reading clues also serve as *reader* clues and indicate something of the gender, age, class, and level of literacy of the first audience to whom the book is addressed" (Davidson 7). In many instances, prescriptive guides contained prefaces, which offer a hint about their intended audience. For instance, in his 1838 guide *The Young Wife*, William Alcott explains his purpose to the reader: "In a word, I have endeavored to take her to be precisely what in the present state of things a wife is, and to give such advice and instruction as, in my own view she needs for the better discharge of her varied duties to herself, her husband, and others" (Alcott 17-18). From these opening remarks, it can be inferred that the Alcott is referring to a reader who is highly literate.

Moreover, the intended audience of these guides is easily discernable because conduct literature frequently contained references about how to behave in relation to domestic servants. Most early nineteenth-century guides did not contain instructions addressed to servants, rather directing their advice toward masters and mistresses. On the topic of servants, one guide offered the following statement asserting that in dealing with servants “the most important precept to be observed is, not to be afraid of your servants” (“The Laws of Etiquette” 120). Hence conduct literature afforded those caught between the middle and upper class the opportunity for social mobility, while at the same time accentuating the divide between the middle and working class. During the nineteenth century, as “the rising classes began to imitate the dress and conduct of older elites” and language grew increasingly standardized, identifying a person on the basis of appearance became almost impossible (Halttunen 37). Conduct literature provided those in the emerging middle class the opportunity to learn how to behave as members of the upper class, a class many aspired to join.

Hygiene: The Marker of Morality

Associating physical cleanliness with moral virtue, prescriptive literature provided clear instructions urging readers not only to keep morally pure, but also to maintain bodily cleanliness. Equating uncleanness with corruption, etiquette guides made little distinction between hygiene and moral purity. As Kathleen Brown, author of *Foul Bodies: Cleanliness in Early America*, explains: “Sin threatened to corrupt the soul and society much like rotten matter infected the body” (Brown 59). In Harvey Newcomb’s *The Young Lady’s Guide to the Harmonious Development of the Christian Character* published 1841, Newcomb asserted the link between bodily cleanliness and morality. “It becomes the *duty* of every Christian,” he wrote, “to use all proper means to maintain a sound, healthful, and vigorous bodily constitution” (Newcomb 146). Consequently, prescriptive literature equated personal hygiene with purity, embodying the notion cleanliness is next to godliness. Virginia Smith further explores this concept in *Clean: A History of Personal Hygiene and Purity*. “To the religious mind,” she contends, “the two worlds were fused as one, and could not be separated” (Smith 3).

Nineteenth-century conduct guides contained messages influenced by Christian religious tradition. Authors emphasized the connection between moral character and tidiness, as “personal cleanliness took on new evidence of a person’s inner life and personal habits, and as an entrée to establishing new social identity” (Hoy 5). Fusing ideas of proper behavior with Christian religious tradition, conduct guides promoted a model of genteel behavior linking moral virtue with ideas about cleanliness.

Bathing

At the most basic level, the notion of regular bathing served a practical purpose: as a safeguard against disease. Shifting population demographics and urbanization increased the risk of disease in the early nineteenth-century. It was quickly recognized that improving personal hygiene and public cleanliness drastically reduced the risk of illness (Hoy 5). In disease ridden nineteenth-century America, cleanliness became the beacon of good health. Advice guides extolled the benefits of daily bathing, describing it as one of “the most effectual means of guarding against colds, and all interruptions of the system” (Thornwell 21). Emily Thornwell’s *The Lady’s Guide to Perfect Gentility*, included an anecdote about Sir Astley Cooper’s exemplary health, which he attributed to his habitual bathing. According to the tale, Cooper frequented “hot, crowded places at all times, night and day, without making any addition to his dress, yet he never caught a cold” (Thornwell 21). Other advice guides provided more medically based explanations for keeping the skin clean. As *The Young Woman’s Book of Health* explained, the skin “is not a mere wrapper; it is vastly more than a covering to the parts beneath it” (Alcott 58). Yet, some advice guides went one step further and encouraged the middle-class to distance itself from the professedly unclean working class, thus, further emphasizing class divisions. Initially published in 1784, Scottish physician William Buchan’s medical guide, *Domestic Medicine*, provided instruction on both household hygiene and health-care practices. With twenty-two editions published, *Domestic Medicine*, gathered international appeal drawing readers from England, Scotland, and the United States during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Brown 131). Buchan’s guide

embodied the tactic of avoidance. “If dirty people cannot be removed as common nuisance,” he explained, “they ought to at least be avoided as infections” (Buchan 101).

Conduct literature extolled the benefits of frequent bathing to “beautify the skin” and enhance complexion. Proper bathing techniques included the use of cold baths to reduce the risk of dry skin and called for the use of grooming aids like soft brushes and horse-hair gloves. For daily bathing, prescriptive literature advocated the use of tepid baths for their “remarkable soothing effects upon the internal organ” and called for water temperatures ranging between ninety-four and ninety-eight degrees (Thornwell 28). For other purposes, other authors advocated the use of cold baths to improve circulation and muscle function. In some instances, authors “recommended the use of the cold bath every day for patients seeking to restore their health, and at least three times a week for those seeking to preserve it” (Brown 201). Despite debates about water temperature, bathing techniques were relatively homogenous, calling for washing the entire body at least once daily followed by “brisk rubbing with a coarse towel” (Newcomb 156).

Hand Care

Hand care also emerged as visible marker of gentility. According to these guides, middle-class Americans should endeavor to preserve the delicacy of their hands by avoiding physical labor. As *A Manual of Politeness* explains, “The formation of the hand, in the first instance, of course comes from nature, and if not distorted in early life by rough usage and hard work, it of course will retain its form as it may be” (“A Manual for Politeness” 156). Thus hand-care practices in conduct literature became a marker of socioeconomic class creating an impossible standard for working class women. For those who performed manual labor, maintaining delicate hands was inconceivable, since physical labor rendered their hands “distorted in shape and make, rough and course, as by their constant use” (“A Manual for Politeness” 156). In addition, women were encouraged to keep their nails properly shaped, rounded and cut short. Again, they were advised to keep their nails free of dirt by “the use of hot water, and the employment of a corner of the towel in turning it back every time you wash”

(“A Manual for Politeness” 162). Published in 1837, *A Manual for Politeness*, accentuated the importance of nail care, implying that after complexion, “the nails attract the most attention to the hand” (“A Manual for Politeness” 162).

Conduct literature provided practical instruction for hand care. Authors emphasized the importance of frequent hand washing, not only as a safeguard against disease, but also to protect the delicate skin of the hands. These manuals included detailed instructions for hand washing calling for the use of warm water and fine soaps. After washing the hands, the skin was to be gently rubbed dry to avoid turning the skin red. Freshly washed hands were then to be gloved (“A Manual for Politeness” 160.) *A Manual of Politeness* explained the importance of wearing gloves asserting, “Gloves too, by ladies, should always be worn in the house; it is a very elegant fashion, and tends much to preserve the delicacy of the hands” (“A Manual for Politeness” 160). Consequently, the call for grooming aids and accessories reflected class-based ideas about personal hygiene, as fine soaps and gloves were luxuries likely only to be owned by members of the middle and upper class.

While guides discussed the importance of soft skin, they also regarded skin discoloration as a mark of the lower and working class. Negligent hand care could manifest itself in skin “of a bad colour,” which could be treated with home remedies like washing the hands in hot water and oatmeal. Similarly, conduct literature advocated the implementation of skin bleaching techniques including the use of lemon juice naturally to lighten skin color (“A Manual for Politeness” 160). When home remedies produced unsatisfactory results, etiquette guides often recommended commercial alternatives. For instance, *A Manual of Politeness*, offered the following recommendation, “With regard to soaps, I have heard many very high encomiums bestowed upon Riggie’s scented soap, for the pleasing effect it has in softening and whitening the skin” (“A Manual for Politeness” 162). Complexion distinguished “white from black and the leisured from the laborer (Brown 132). Thus, middle-class women strove to make their skin as light and smooth as possible to pronounce their class status.

Skin Care

Furthermore, conduct literature frequently dealt with common skin concerns including acne and signs of aging. Clear complexions enhanced beauty and as one guide clarified: “A young woman with very indifferent features, but a fine complexion, will from ten persons out of twelve, receive spontaneous and warm admiration” (“Etiquette for Ladies 117). Women were warned to take care of their skin to avoid blemishes which “with the exception of the small-pox, pimples are the most destructive enemies to beauty” (Thornwell 25). According to these guides, the most effective cure for acne included the use of warm water to improve circulation. Women were also warned not to use certain remedies like lead based cold creams and “the use of large doses of vinegar” (Thornwell 25). Moreover, skin care advice encouraged women to take precautions against signs of aging. Women were instructed to prevent wrinkles by maintaining a healthy diet, frequent washing with cold water, and regular exfoliation. Some guides even made lofty claims about the effectiveness of their skin care instructions. For instance, one claimed that following their directions “will insure to persons ten years’ exemption from the invasion of these disagreeable reminders of mortality, beyond the period that unassisted nature would have imparted” (Thornwell 26). Moreover, prescriptive literature linked ideas about hygiene and cleanliness with morality. In *Etiquette for Ladies, With Hints on the Preservation and Display of Female Beauty*, the connection between moral virtue and skin care is made clear. The guide explained, “A fine clear skin, gives an assurance of the inherent residence of three admirable graces to beauty; wholesomeness, neatness, and cheerfulness” (“Etiquette for Ladies 118). Other guides were less overt in their messages, such as William Alcott’s *The Young Woman’s Book of Health*. Commenting on female beauty, Alcott remarked: “She desires to *appear* well-to be regarded as beautiful. Perfectly right. It should be so. Beauty is almost virtue” (Alcott 14). Placing a great deal of emphasis on appearance, guides emphasized the idea that outward beauty reflected what was on the inside and served as a means for gauging a woman’s moral character.

Ideas about appearance in prescriptive literature rested upon the concept of the transparency of beauty. Following this notion, “true womanly beauty was not an accident of form; it was

the outward expression of a virtuous mind and heart” (Halttunen 71). While conduct literature asserted ideas about maintaining a state of natural beauty, they also valued the use of cosmetics to enhance appearance. In many instances, prescriptive literature offered an evaluation of different cosmetics for their efficacy and value. Again the advice was class based as women were instructed to use luxury cosmetics, which were deemed the least damaging to the skin. Of these products, pearl powders and blush were regarded “the least hurtful to the complexion” and when used properly were evaluated to “give the most beautiful appearance” (Thornwell 28). Regular scrubbing of the face with a mixture of brandy and rose-water helped the skin maintain softness while washing away impurities (“Etiquette for Ladies” 123).

Dental Care

In addition to skin care, conduct literature provided models for dental hygiene as well. Commenting on the teeth, one guide explained, “No gift is more acceptable from Nature than good teeth. To appreciate, to value them fully, their loss must first be previously felt” (“A Manual for Politeness 164). After the 1800, new ideas about dental care emerged with the popularization of the toothbrush. Prior to the invention of toothbrush, most Americans relied on primitive techniques rinsing their mouths with water and cleaning their teeth with rags. Toothbrushes represented just “one of many specialized grooming aids, most of which far exceeded the ordinary person’s arsenal for personal care” (Brown 136). Similar to skin care, women were instructed to avoid discoloration of the teeth. Authors commented on the common causes of discoloration: sugar laden foods, infrequent cleaning, and “the biting of threads among girls when sewing” (“A Manual for Politeness” 165). Furthermore, they argued that regular brushing of the teeth guarded against not only enamel decay, but also bad breath. Conduct literature also included medically based explanations for tainted breath listing lung disease, nasal ulcers, tobacco use, and habitual drinking as common causes. For severe cases, guides called for the use of remedies like consuming “a teaspoonful of yeast, mixed with a little luke-warm water” or “ten grains of powdered charcoal, in a glass of spring-water” (“A Manual for Politeness” 175). Encouraging women to pay

attention to their teeth, etiquette guides relegated oral hygiene to the same realm as skin care, making it an indicator of middle class status in nineteenth-century America. Yet, these ideas were class based because not all women had the resources to support these habits.

Hair Care

In addition, hair care remained the focus of prescriptive literature, instructing women how to style their hair in accordance with the latest trends. In most guides, natural hair color was preferred. As with makeup, prescriptive guides encouraged women to emphasize their natural beauty noting that, “the native colour of our hair is, in general, better adapted to our own complexions than a wig of a contrary hue” (“Etiquette for Ladies” 129). Guides advised women to style their hair with neatness, taste and propriety, yet, they warned against spending too much time on hair care. They implied that women should strike a balance between excessive styling and not styling their hair at all urging them to “give just as much thought and attention to the subject as will enable her to do it, and no more” (Arthur 93). In addition, specific hairstyles signified a marker of social class. Conduct literature alluded to this notion, asserting that hairstyles demonstrating “a regard for external order, beauty, and propriety,” shall render “presence welcome in circles of taste and refinement (Arthur 94). While women were instructed to bathe daily, hair washing occurred less frequently. In between washes, women were urged to sleep with their hair covered to prevent contaminating their otherwise clean bodies (Alcott, “The Young Woman’s Guide to Excellence” 266). Combining ideas about cleanliness and moral virtue, hairstyles served as another marker of social class.

Dress

Lastly, prescriptive literature emphasized the importance of proper dress as a visual marker of one’s socioeconomic status. Linzy Brekke notes the significance of clothing as a status symbol. “The color, fit, texture, and quality of cloth,” she suggests, “conveyed messages about status occupation, gender, wealth, and age, as well as individual personal characteristics such as modesty (or lack thereof), sexuality, religious orientation, and urbanity” (Brekke 113). Conduct literature provided women with clear instructions on dress,

providing them with models of not only what types of clothing to wear, but also how to wear them. Similar to hairstyles, dress emerged as a marker of class because it “was worn before an observing and censorious public” (Brekke 127). The 1836 guide, *The Laws of Etiquette*, commented on the importance of dress, explaining, “First impressions are apt to be permanent; it is therefore of importance that they should be favourable. The dress of an individual is that circumstance from which you first form your opinion of him” (“The Laws of Etiquette” 25). Similarly, the new emphasis on women’s appearances coincided with an era of population growth, urbanization, and mobility, at a time when one’s social life became increasingly public. Brekke notes how during this period, “locations to see and be seen proliferated: taverns, coffee houses, parks, boulevards line with retail outlets, national fêtes, revivals, and older social rituals like baptisms, courtships weddings, and funerals were becoming increasingly commodified” (Brekke 128).

Dress

Similar to bathing, conduct literature considered proper dress to be a matter of good health. Authors insisted that women wear seasonally appropriate clothing some even lamented the use of stays and corsets. For instance, *The Philosophy of Common Sense* warned readers about the numerous health consequences women risked from their use including cancer, spinal deformities, compression of the ribs, respiratory problems, and digestive issues (Carey 66). At the end of this essay are images from the *Philosophy of Common Sense* of two skeletons: one who regularly wore a corset, and another who did not.

Merging ideas about morality with concepts of proper dress, advice guides encouraged middle class women to dress modestly. In terms of its recommendations for proper dress, conduct literature instructed women to choose their clothing while considering their age and figure. Authors also noted the importance of possessing “neatness of dress and taste” when selecting clothing colors. For instance, *Etiquette for Ladies*, commented on the issue of color selection with the following statement:

If a lady does not possess a good eye for colour, she ought never to rely

upon her own judgment in the selection of her patterns, or in their arrangement upon her person, else she will be nothing more than a walking violation of all the harmony of light and shade; and however expensively dress, she will never appear either genteel or fashionable.

("Etiquette for Ladies" 60-61).

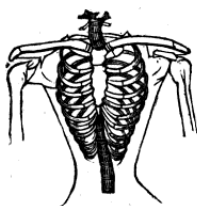
It is important to note that prescriptive literature "almost required that the use of bright colors should be more restrained in the clothing of the American gentry" (Bushman 70). Moreover, prescriptive literature noted the importance of wearing clean clothing with assertions like "propriety requires that we should always be clothed in a clean and becoming manner, even in private" ("Etiquette for Ladies 61). Similarly, women were encouraged to adopt modest dress styles. Commenting on revealing clothing, William Alcott asked his readers in *The Young Woman's Guide to Excellence* "Does the world in which we live, contain sources enough of temptation, and avenues enough to vice, seduction and misery, without increasing their number by our dress" (Alcott 273). Merging ideas about morality with concepts of proper dress, advice guides encouraged middle class women to dress modestly.

In sum, prescriptive literature helped to shape the formation of the middle class through its remarks on topics such as hygiene, cleanliness, and appearance. Providing specific instruction for elite women about bathing, skin care, dental care, hairstyles, and dress, these guides emphasized specific ideas about appearance for middle-class Americans. These ideas served as visual reminders of socioeconomic class and distinguished the emerging middle class from the working class. Conduct literature linked notions of bodily cleanliness with moral virtue to produce a model of gender specific middle-class behavior. Consequently, these ideas about appearance presented in these books provided the aspiring middle class the opportunity to emulate the behavior of the upper class. Their standards for polite behavior served as both a catalyst and a barrier. Ideas about appearance presented in these books provided the aspiring middle class the opportunity to emulate the behavior of the upper class. Conversely, their rules for social conduct

further distanced the middle class from the working class.

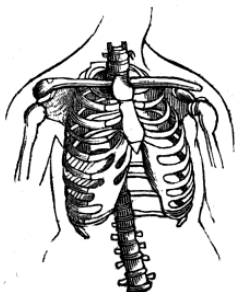
Figure 1- Illustration from the 1838 *Philosophy of Common Sense* about corsets

CONTRACTED CHEST.



"An outline is here presented of the chest of a female, to show the actual condition of the bones, as they appear after death, in every lady who has habitually worn stays.

SKELETON OF A WELL-FORMED FEMALE CHEST.



"By comparing the accompanying plan of a well-developed and naturally-proportioned female chest, with the frightful skeleton appended to the preceding note, the difference is strikingly apparent. Here is breadth—space for the lungs to act in; and the short ribs are thrown outwards, instead of being curved and twisted down towards the spine, by which ample space is afforded for the free action of all those organs, which in the other frame, were *too small to sustain life*. The first may be

Source: Matthew Carey, *Philosophy of Common Sense: Practical Rules for the Promotion of Domestic Happiness Containing Rules for the Married* (Philadelphia: M. Carey, 1838), 70-71.

References

- A Handbook of Etiquette for Ladies. New York: Leavitt and Allen, 1847. E-book.
<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc2.ark:/13960/t0zp48s8c;view=2up;seq=5>.
- A Manual of Politeness: Comprising the Principles of Etiquette, and Rules of Proper Behaviour in Genteel Society, for Persons of Both Sexes. Philadelphia: W. Marshall & Co., 1837. E-book.
<http://books.google.com/books/reader?id=hVoEAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&pg=GBS.PA3>.
- Etiquette for Ladies: With Hints on the Preservation, Improvement, and Display of Female Beauty. Philadelphia: Lea &

- Blanchard, 1840. E-book.
http://books.google.com/books/about/Etiquette_for_Ladies.html?id=G8FAAAAAYAAJ.
- Ladies' Vase: or, Polite Manual for Young Ladies. Lowell: Dayton, 1843. E-book.
<https://archive.org/details/theladiesvase16802gut>.
- My daughter's manual: comprising a summary view of female studies, accomplishments, and principles of conduct. New York: Appleton, 1837. E-book.
<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433081636783;view=1up;seq=13>.
- The American Lady's and Gentleman's Modern Letter Writer: Relative to Business, Duty, Love, and Marriage. Philadelphia: Henry F. Annars. E-book.
<http://digital.library.pitt.edu/cgi-bin/t/text/text-idx?c=nietz;cc=nietz;view=toc;idno=00abh6702m>.
- The American Letter Writer, and Mirror of Polite Behavior. Philadelphia: Fisher and Brother, 1850.
- The Art of Good Behavior; And Letter Writer on Love, Courtship and Marriage. New York: C.P. Huestis, 1846.
- The Book of Manners: A Guide to Social Intercourse. New York: Carlton & Phillips Publishing, 1851. E-book.
<https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=Pf9ZAAAAMAAJ&rdid=book-Pf9ZAAAAMAAJ&rdot=1>.
- The Family Book: Or Instructions Concerning All Relations of Life. New York: D. Appleton, 1835. E-book.
http://books.google.com/books/about/The_Family_Book.html?id=HD0vAAAAYAAJ..
- The Female Instructor. Liverpool: Printed by Nuttall, Fisher, and Dixon, 1815. E-book.
http://books.google.com/books/about/The_Female_Instructor_Or_Young_Woman_s_C.html?id=EZ5TAAAcAAJ.
- The Laws of Etiquette: Or, Short Rules and Reflections for Conduct in Society. Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1836. E-book.
http://books.google.com/books/about/The_Laws_of_Etiquette.html?id=0ao9AAAAYAAJ.

- The Women of England: Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits, in the Family Monitor and Domestic Guide. New York: Henry S. Langley, 1844. E-book.
<http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001055277>.
- Abbot, John Stevens Cabot. The Maternal Duty. Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1833. Microfilm 4459, Reel 1, The Schlesinger Collection of Etiquette and Advice Books from the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, The University of Pennsylvania's Van Pelt Library Microfilm Collection.
- Abell, L.G. Mrs. The Skillful Housewife's Book; Or Complete Guide to Domestic Cookery, Taste, Comfort, and Economy. New York: D. Newell, 1846. E-book.
<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044087415543;view=2up;seq=8>.
- Adams, Catherine Lyman. Daily Duties Inculcated in a Series of Letters Addressed to the Wife of a Clergyman. Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1835. E-book.
http://books.google.com/books/about/Daily_duties_inculcated_in_a_series_of_1.html?id=y0EOAAAAYAAJ.
- Alcott, William. Letters to a Sister: Or, Woman's Mission. Buffalo: Derby, 1850. E-book.
<http://books.google.com/books/reader?id=oLhYAAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&pg=GBS.PR8>.
- Alcott, William. The Young Mother, or Management of Children in Regard to Health. 8th edition. Boston: George Light, 1839. E-book.
<https://archive.org/details/youngmotherorma00alco>.
- Alcott, William. The Young Wife. Boston: G.W. Light, 1838. E-book.
<https://archive.org/details/youngmotherorma00alco>.
- Alcott, William. The Young Woman's Book of Health. New York: Miller, Orton, and Mulligan, 1855. E-book.
<https://archive.org/details/youngwomansbook00alco>.
- Alcott, William. The Young Woman's Guide to Excellence. Boston: G.W. Light, 1840. E-book. Duke University Libraries.
<http://archive.org/details/youngwomansguide00alco>.
- Arthur, Timothy. Advice to Young Ladies on their Duties and Conduct in Life. Boston: Phillips and Samson, 1849. E-book.
<https://archive.org/details/advicetoyounglad00arth>.
- Arthur, Timothy. The Young Wife's Book: A Manual of Moral, Religious, and Domestic Duties. Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, and Blanchard, 1838. E-book.
<http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/ref/collection/tb1/id/4226>.
- Atmore, Charles. Serious Advice from a Father to His Children; Respecting Their Conduct in the World; Civil, Moral, and Religious. Philadelphia: J.H. Cunningham, 1818.
- Bakewell, Mrs. J. The Mother's Practical Guide in the Early Training of Her Children Containing Directions for their Physical, Intellectual, and Moral Education. London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co., 1836. E-book.
<http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009733405>.
- Bowen. Abel. The Young Lady's Book; A Manual of Elegant Recreations, Exercises, and Pursuits. London: Vizetelly, Branston, and Co., 1829. E-book.
<https://archive.org/details/youngladybookma00londiala>.
- Brekke, Linzy. "The Scourge of Fashion": Political Economy and the Politics of Consumption in the Early Republic." Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal 3, Number 1 (Spring 2005): 111-139.
- Brown, Kathleen. Foul Bodies: Cleanliness in Early America. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. Print.
- Buchan, William. Domestic Medicine, Or, A Treatise on the Prevention and Cure of Disease by Regimen and Simple Medicines With an Appendix Containing a Dispensatory for the Use of Private Practitioners. Edinburgh: A. Strahan, 1790. E-book.
http://books.google.com/books/about/Domestic_Medicine_Or_A_Treatise_on_the_P.htm?id=SGYFAAAAQAAJ.
- Burton, John. Lectures on Female Education and Manners. Baltimore: Published by Samuel

- Jefferis, 1811. E-book.
<https://archive.org/details/lecturesonfemal00burtgoog>.
- Bushman, Richard L. *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*. New York: Knopf, 1992. Print.
- Carey, Matthew. *Philosophy of Common Sense: Practical Rules for the Promotion of Domestic Happiness Containing Rules for the Married*. Philadelphia: M. Carey, 1838. E-book.
http://books.google.com/books/about/Philosophy_of_Common_Sense.html?id=67kaAAAYAAJ.
- Carter, Susannah. *The Frugal Housewife, Or, Complete Woman Cook*. Philadelphia: Matthew Carey, 1802. E-book.
<https://archive.org/details/frugalhousewife00cart>.
- Chapone, Hester. *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind: Addressed to a Lady*. London: Printed for John Sharpe, 1829. E-book.
<https://archive.org/details/lettersonimprov04chapgoog>.
- Coale, Edward. *The American Lady's Preceptor: A Compilation of Observations, Essays, and Poetical Effusions Designed to Direct the Female Mind in a Course of Pleasing and Instructive Reading*. Baltimore: Benjamin Edes, 1810. Claire T. Carney Library, University of Massachusetts Digital Research Resources. E-book.
<http://archive.org/details/americanladyspre00balt>.
- Crocker, Hannah Mather. *Observations on the Real Rights of Women With their Appropriate Duties Agreeable to Scripture, Reason, and Common Sense*. 1818.
- Davidson, Cathy. *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. Print.
- Eliot, William. *Lectures to Young Women*. Boston: Crosby, Nichols, and Co., 1856. Print.
- Ewell, Thomas. *Letters to Ladies, Detailing Important Information, Concerning Themselves and Infants*. Philadelphia: Printed for the author, 1817. Print.
- Farrar, Eliza Ware. *The Young Lady's Friend*. Boston: American Stationer's Co., 1836. Print.
- Ferguson, Anna. *The Young Lady or Guide to Knowledge, Virtue, and Happiness*. Nashua, NH: J.M. Fletcher, 1850. Print.
- Fry, Caroline. *A Word to Women; The Love of the World, and other Gatherings*. Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1840. E-book.
<https://archive.org/details/wordtowomenlove000fryc>.
- Gillet, Robert. *The Pleasures of Reason; Or, the Hundred Thoughts of a Sensible Young Lady*. Boston: T. Wells, 1809. Print.
- Gisborne, Thomas. *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*. 6th Edition. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1805. E-book.
<https://archive.org/details/anenquiryintodu02gisbgoog>.
- Grant, Anne MacVicar. *Sketches of Intellectual Education, and Hints on Domestic Economy, addressed to mothers*. Baltimore: Edward J. Cole, 1813. Print.
- Hall, David D., Robert A. Gross, and Mary Kelley. *A History of the Book in America: An Extensive Republic Print Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*. Vol. 2. Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina, 2010. Print.
- Halttunen, Karen. *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830-1870*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1982. Print.
- Harmon, Nolan B. *The Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, Vol. 2. Nashville: United Methodist Pub. House, 1974. Print.
- Hawes, Joel. *A Looking-Glass for Ladies, or, The formation and excellence of the female character*. Boston: William D. Ticknor, 1845. E-book.
<http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008375610>.
- Hemphill, C. Dallett. *Bowing to Necessities: A History of Manners in America, 1620-1860*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. Print.
- Hoy, Suellen. *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Miller, Robert. *Short Advices to Young Women on the Subject of Courtship*. Nottingham: Printed and Sold by H. Barnett Miller, 1809. Print.
- Moore, John Hamilton. *The Young Gentleman and*

- Lady's Monitor. New York: Daniel Smith, 1824. E-book.
<https://archive.org/details/younggentleman00unkngoog>.
- Muzzey, Artemas. The Young Maiden. Boston: William Crosby, 1840. E-book.
<https://archive.org/stream/youngmaiden02muzzgoog#page/n4/mode/2up>.
- Newcomb, Harvey. A Practical Directory for Young Christian Females; Being a Series of Letters from a Brother to a Younger Sister. 7th edition. Boston: Sabbath School Society, ca. 1833.
<https://archive.org/details/apracticaldirect17934gut>. E-book.
- Newcomb, Harvey. The Young Lady's Guide to the Harmonious Development of Christian Character. Boston: James B. Dow Publisher, 1841. E-book.
<https://archive.org/stream/youngladysguid00newc#page/n7/mode/2up>.
- Parkes, Mrs. William. Instructions to the Young Married Ladies on the Management of their Households, and Regulations of their Conduct in the Various Relations and Duties of Moral Life. New York: J & J Harper, 1829. E-book.
<https://archive.org/details/domesticdutiesor00parkrich>.
- Pierce, Charles. The Portsmouth Miscellany, or Lady's Library Improved. Portsmouth, N.H.: Peirce, Hill, and Peirce, 1809. E-Book.
 Villanova University Falvey Memorial Library.
- Porter, James. The Operative's Friend, and Defence; Or, Hints to Young Ladies, Who Are Dependent on Their Own Exertions. Boston: C.H. Pierce, 1850. Print.
- Sanford, Mrs. John. Woman, in her Social and Domestic Character. Boston: Leonard C. Bowles, 1833. E-book.
<https://archive.org/details/womaninhersocial02sandgoog>.
- Smith, Virginia. Clean: A Personal History of Hygiene and Purity. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Print.
- Taylor, Ann Martin. Practical Hints on the Duties of a Wife, a Mother, and a Mistress of a Family. Boston: Wells and Lilly Publishing, 1820. E-book.
- <https://archive.org/details/practicalhintsto00tayl>.
- Tebbel, John. History of Book Publishing in the United States: V. 1: The Creation of an Industry, 1630-1865. S.l.: Bowker, 1972. Print.
- Thornwell, Emily. The Lady's Guide to Perfect Gentility. New York: Derby and Jackson, 1856.
<https://archive.org/details/ladysguidetoper00thorgoog>. E-book.
- Weaver, George Sumner. Hopes and Helps for the Young of Both Sexes. New York: Fowles and Wells Publishers, 1855. E-book.
<https://archive.org/details/hopesandhelpsfo01weavgoog>.