“INTELLECTUAL DIFFICULTIES”: REDEFINING THE VICTORIAN FAMILY’S ROLE IN THE DEBATE OVER WOMEN’S EDUCATION

by

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Abstract

Born in 1849 to upper middle-class parents, Constance Maynard was one of the first women in England to receive a university degree. As an adult Maynard addressed women’s education to various academic and governmental bodies and helped to establish a tradition of women’s educational institutions in Britain. Her education and career, however, challenged prescriptive notions of “appropriate” gender roles in Victorian society which painted women as only wives and mothers. Maynard authored an unpublished autobiography and a diary written from the age of sixteen. Her writings help to illuminate the public debates surrounding the “Woman Question” and the education of women taking place in Victorian society. Historians of these debates have consistently painted the middle-class family as a bulwark against social change and portrayed the Victorian family as something against which Britain’s first generation of college educated women could rebel. Like the historians who have examined her writings, Maynard participated in constructing a dichotomy between the conservative Victorian home and the liberating effects of women’s education. She ignores her family’s influence on her childhood and adolescent education and separates her adult achievements from her experiences in the Maynard family home. Victorian parents like the Maynards, who, despite institutional and ideological impediments, persisted in educating their daughters, however, confronted questions of defining “appropriate” familial, gender and social relations. Examination of Maynard’s writings allows the historian to reconsider the Victorian family’s role in the decisions affecting the lives of single, educated and professional women in modern Britain. Maynard’s impressions of her childhood home and reflections on the decisions made about her education form the basis for the history of a woman who defied convention, but also for the history of a family which experienced and challenged ideal conceptions of gender roles and relations. Maynard’s story enables the historian to write the family into the history of the debates over women’s education. Rather than opposing family life to the values of single, Victorian women, Maynard’s experiences lend themselves to a more integrated history of gender identity formation and the lived experiences of families in Victorian Britain.
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Introduction

By nature I have a contented and cheerful spirit, bright and possibly superficial, with strongly artistic tastes, with a hunger for love and a value put on beauty...and this does not seem the right outfit with which to confront masses of intellectual difficulties. But again, it must be taken into account that [my] education was of the very strictest sort, guarded and repressive to the last point of anything fanciful, foolish or exaggerated...To use the nomenclature of Matthew Arnold, I was a thorough ‘Greek’ brought up in the school of the strongest kind of ‘Hebrew.’

So wrote Constance Louisa Maynard in the early decades of the twentieth century. Maynard was born in 1849, into the upper middle-class household of Henry and Louisa Maynard. As an adult, she was one of those women in the Victorian period around whom the debate over the “Woman Question” centred. Maynard was one of the first women in England to receive a university degree, and in 1882 she helped to establish Westfield College for women at the University of London. The concern over women like Maynard arose from larger questions about women’s nature and their “appropriate” role in Victorian society. The “Woman Question” was a response to the increasing visibility of middle-class women who, like Maynard, did not become wives and mothers.

Questions about the nature of women’s rights, their responsibilities within Victorian society, and their physical and mental capabilities were addressed under the rubric of a general “Woman Question.” By the latter half of the nineteenth century, issues raised by the debates surrounding the “Woman Question” were central to the growing concern over the nature of women’s education. Education played an important role in socializing students, and in shaping their values, attitudes and aspirations. As one Victorian author argued, the purpose of education “is to fit children for the position in life which they are hereafter to occupy.”

When the Schools Inquiry Commission published
its report in 1868, it made explicit the connection between schooling and socialization, arguing that girls' schooling should be principally concerned with "the growth and development of the female character." The Commission recognized the dual purpose of female education. Just as schooling could prepare boys for college or eventual employment, the commissioners acknowledged that girls' schooling could help single women find a productive role in society, and prevent their becoming "a great drain [to Britain's] male population." But despite their recognition of the potential for schooling to improve the position of single women in society, the commissioners emphasized instead education's role in preparing women for their eventual roles as wives and mothers. The contents of the Report reveal the increasing tension between the social reality of increasing numbers of single women who lacked a defined role in Victorian society and an ideal which presumed a maternal and marital role for all women. Schooling's potential to prepare women for economic independence or to equip them for motherhood and marriage made education a central focus of debate and concern in Victorian Britain.

The debate over the education of women was a debate over the very identity of women in Victorian society.

In the midst of these debates, Constance Maynard grew up, received private tutelage at home, attended private school, earned a degree at Girton College, Cambridge, and became an active proponent of women's right to receive an education. Her experiences as a student at Girton and as a teacher are relevant to scholars of women, feminism and Victorian society. Like her contemporaries Frances Buss, Dorothea Beale and Emily Davies, Maynard played a crucial role in addressing women's education to various academic and governmental bodies and helped to establish a tradition of women's
educational institutions in Britain. She authored a diary written almost daily from the age of seventeen, and an unpublished autobiography written in the early decades of the twentieth century. Maynard was not only central to the process that transformed women’s education in this period, but her writings illuminate the public debates surrounding the education of women. Indeed, Maynard’s autobiography was written with the explicit purpose of demonstrating “the inception...[and] the course of a great national movement, that which used to be called ‘the Higher Education of Women.’”

Since histories of the women’s education movement first appeared, feminist scholarship has developed beyond writing the stories of women “hidden from history.” Influenced by the feminist theory of scholars like Joan Scott, whose vision of gender as a “useful category of historical analysis” has had a profound effect on the field, women’s history has “discovered in its own right the power of language, of discourses, to socially construct...[gender] inequalities and to anchor them in social practice.” Poststructural theorists like Mariana Valverde have built upon Scott’s theoretical foundations, asserting that the project for historians is to offer a “historical critique of gender formation,” one that is rooted in the study of material and intellectual conditions underlying and making possible social categorizations. Such a critique, argues Valverde, must examine the social structures which perpetuate and support the existence of gendered spheres and the characteristics associated with masculinity and femininity. Gender analysis is particularly important to educational histories, because, as Felicity Hunt has argued, “within the educational process...we discover the nurturance of gender divisions in society.”

Gender theory has influenced scholars across various disciplines and political and
theoretical positions, and has had a profound effect on the histories of modern societies. Scholars like Linda Kerber and Denise Riley have extended a deconstructive approach to analyses of how ideological divisions operate in structuring nineteenth century societies.\textsuperscript{10} Beyond treating separate spheres as historically contingent, ideological constructions, however, poststructural scholarship has fuelled a debate in the historiography as to whether analysis of separate sphere rhetoric, in a particular historical context, serves to illuminate past issues, or to further obscure them.\textsuperscript{11} One strand of this scholarship warns against dismissing the paradigmatic influence of separate spheres in histories of the modern period. Instead, it demands an analysis of how articulations of gender characteristics influenced the experiences of men and women in modern societies.\textsuperscript{12} Some recent histories of Victorian society have begun to question the extent to which historical actors are aware of the ideological and cultural context in which they find themselves.\textsuperscript{13} This perspective does not necessarily implicate historical subjects in "transformative action," whereby this knowledge allows them to cast off the ideological paradigms upon which their society is founded.\textsuperscript{14} In the context of histories of modern Britain, it does, however, require the historian to consider the extent to which subjects had some recognition of the operations of gender within their society, and whether their actions were affected by that knowledge. The debates over the "Woman Question" were widespread and covered a broad range of issues about the dynamics of gender roles and relations in Victorian society. The extent to which families like the Maynards were aware of the controversy surrounding women's education had the potential to affect their decisions regarding the education of their daughters.

Historians of modern Britain, influenced by gender theory, have demonstrated the
manner in which the participants in the debates over the “Woman Question” have negotiated, challenged or upheld the gender discourse underlying Victorian society. Yet, almost without exception, they treat the Victorian family as a static and conservative institution, impervious to larger social debates and to their implications for social change. When parental influence over and concern with regard to the education of women is considered at all, it is viewed in this conservative light. In her autobiography, Constance Maynard, herself, traces her “intellectual difficulties” to the fact that her childhood education and socialization did not cultivate or encourage her intellectual development, and separates her adult achievements from her experiences in the Maynard home. Consideration of how Victorian families, like the Maynards, could be influenced by their knowledge of the debates over “appropriate” gender roles in society, however, requires the historian to reassess the emphasis on the Victorian family’s opposition to social change.

It has been more than fifty years since Constance Maynard’s journals, Greenbooks and writings were left to the Westfield College archives at the University of London. At mid-century C. B. Firth was the first author granted access to the Maynard sources. Published in 1949, Firth’s book was based on both Maynard’s hand-written records and his interviews with family members. It is principally a chronological account of the lives of the Maynard family. Firth makes little effort to place Maynard’s youth in any historical context but his narrative stands nearly alone in its concern with the details of Maynard’s childhood and early family life. He asserts that “the twenty-three years of home life shaped [Maynard’s] character” but paints those years in stark contrast to her adult life and work, giving little evidence to reinforce his claim. Nonetheless, by
providing family background and detailed accounts of the events in Maynard’s life, Firth’s book has formed the basis for much of the more contemporary research on Maynard.

Since the 1980s, Maynard’s writings have been employed by a variety of historians interested in the experience of first wave feminists and pioneers of the women’s education movement. These scholars tend to leave family issues unexplored, and refer largely to the events of Maynard’s adult life. Those who do broach the subject of Maynard’s experience at home reinforce the straightforwardly conservative assessment of the Maynard family seen in Maynard’s own writings. Carol Dyhouse included Maynard in her book which sought to place the feminist endeavours of the 1970s and 80s in context by examining the experience and accomplishments of Victorian feminists. In her brief treatment of Maynard, Dyhouse consistently depicts Maynard’s home life as in direct conflict with her education and later feminist inclinations. She perceives the socialization received in the Victorian home as reinforcing gender norms, while only the institutionalized schooling of women allowed for the potential renegotiation of Victorian gender ideals.

Maynard’s experience figured more prominently in two works specifically concerned with the education of women in the Victorian period: Perry William’s essay on Girton College and Martha Vicinus’ Independent Women which examined the lives and choices of “redundant” or single, middle-class women, in the late-Victorian period. As in Williams’ essay, Vicinus was primarily interested in Maynard’s roles as a student and a teacher in England’s first women’s colleges and in demonstrating how the women involved in the nineteenth century debate over female manoeuvred within contemporary
gender discourse. Vicinus viewed Maynard as a woman condemned to be confined like an “eagle in a hen house,” whose career aspirations placed her in direct conflict with the Victorian family structure. While the focus on Maynard’s university and teaching experience, in Dyhouse, Williams and Vicinus’ work, represents a logical chronological division, it reinforces the separation of family life from career decisions. This emphasis away from analysis of Maynard’s home life has continued into recent years. In an article published in 2000, Maria Tamboukou dismisses the influence of the Maynard home in one sentence. She concludes that Constance Maynard “came from a strict Evangelical family and had to overcome many difficulties before she was allowed to sit the examinations for entering [Girton] college.” According to all of these authors, the Maynard home was repressive, religious and rigid, whereas the university provided an opportunity for freedom, however narrowly defined.

Only Deborah Gorham has carefully addressed Maynard’s home life and adolescent experiences, however, her work reinforces the conservative impression of the Maynard home found in contemporary scholarship. In her book The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal, Gorham sought to expose the previously unexplored experience of young women, like Maynard, in Victorian Britain and to examine the influence of the rhetoric of ideal Victorian femininity on the lives of her subjects. Gorham describes Maynard’s “circumscribed” childhood and adolescent years and the conflict between Victorian ideals for feminine behaviour and abilities and Maynard’s own ambitions. According to Gorham, “Constance Maynard found her way to Girton and to an independent life...through her own determination, and with only reluctant support from her family.” With this statement, however, Gorham perpetuates the separation of
middle-class family life from larger social debates, and concludes that the family supported and upheld prescriptive notions of Victorian femininity. Maynard's decision to attend school and to pursue a career is viewed as both separate from, and in spite of, her childhood experience at home. Indeed, the only role the family has in the accounts of Maynard's life is to provide something against which Maynard can rebel through her academic or career achievements.

Like the historians who have examined her writings, Constance Maynard participated in constructing a dichotomy between the conservative Victorian home and the liberating effects of women's education. The consistent characterization of the Victorian family as conservative and the overt dismissal of its significant role in the lives of Britain's first generation of college-educated women is, however, too simplistic. In the late-nineteenth century the education of girls was not compulsory, nor was it common for girls to receive formal schooling. As W. B. Stephens has demonstrated, parental demand for girls' education increased in response to a variety of factors throughout the last half of the nineteenth century, but it cannot be explained in terms of increased legislation or regulation until well after Maynard attended school.21 The education of women offered a potential challenge to conventional articulations of familial and gender roles in Victorian society and implicated individual families in the ongoing debates over feminine identity. Yet, despite institutional and ideological impediments, some middle-class families in Victorian Britain persisted in educating their daughters. In decisions about girls' education, middle-class Victorian parents, like the Maynards, confronted the question of defining "appropriate" familial, gender and social relations.

The historiography of the Victorian women's education movement focuses,
primarily, on the debate over the University education of women. Like those authors who have examined the Maynard sources, this historiography leaves the elementary and adolescent education of women unexplored and precludes any discussion of the Victorian family's role in decision-making with regard to educating daughters. Even histories of women's higher education tend to dismiss the fact that women remained, in most cases, financially dependent on their families for funds to attend college. Examination of the diaries and autobiography of Constance Maynard offers the opportunity to explore the childhood and adolescent experience of a girl growing up in an upper-middle-class British family in the second half of the nineteenth century. More importantly, it allows the historian to reconsider the Victorian family's role in the decisions affecting the lives of women attending school in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Victorian family cannot be viewed as a bulwark against social change, or as straightforwardly opposed to women's education and the re-articulation of female roles in Victorian society.

A reconsideration of the ideological and historically contingent nature of the public/private dichotomy in Victorian society necessitates asking new questions with regard to the analysis of the family's role in the debate over women's education, and raises new avenues of inquiry in histories of the Victorian family. The Victorian family cannot be considered as removed from the debates over women's education or opposed to the challenges to conventional articulations of feminine identity. A more comprehensive analysis of the debate over women's education must acknowledge the Victorian family as both influenced by, and active in, that debate. The Victorian family must be understood to have experienced, negotiated and potentially resisted social categorizations based upon
gender. In deciding whether, and how, to educate their daughters, when it was neither compulsory nor consistently the norm, the middle-class, Victorian family was implicated in the debates surrounding the “Woman Question” and active in re-articulating “female” roles in society at large. Maynard’s impressions of her childhood at home and her reflections on the nature of her parents’ decisions about her education form the basis not only for the history of a woman who defied convention, but also for the history of a family which experienced and challenged ideal conceptions of gender roles and relations. Maynard’s story, therefore, provides us with an opportunity to write the family into the history of the debates over women’s education and to rewrite the history of separate spheres. Rather than opposing family life to the values of single, Victorian women, Maynard’s experiences lend themselves to a more integrated history of gender identity formation and the lived experiences of families in Victorian Britain.

The Henry Maynard Family

Henry Maynard and Louisa Hillyard were married in 1837. Louisa’s family was descended from wealthy Huguenot immigrants, and Henry, a merchant with interests in South Africa, was the favourite son of a wealthy middle-class family. Together, Henry and Louisa set up house in London and they began their family in 1839 with the birth of their first child, a daughter named Josephine. In 1843, an increasingly wealthy Henry purchased Park Terrace, a house in the London suburb of Highbury, for his growing family. By 1849, the Maynard family included sons Harry and George, and three more daughters, Gabrielle, Dora, and Constance. Constance Maynard spent most of her
childhood and adolescent years at Oakfield, the house her father purchased in 1854 outside the village of Hawkhurst in Kent. While the Maynard children enjoyed the company of numerous cousins, as well as some friends within the Hawkhurst neighbourhood, theirs was a close-knit nursery. Raised under the constant supervision of their mother, with the attendance of governesses and nurses, the Maynard children were one another’s first and greatest playmates. Outwardly, the Maynard family epitomized the prescribed upper middle-class family structure promoted in the mid-Victorian period. Henry and Louisa inhabited two separate spheres and had differentiated roles and responsibilities within their home and the society in which they lived. Below the surface, however, the lived experience of the Maynard family reveals the complexities of life in modern British society.

From the earliest years of his marriage and family life, Henry Maynard’s primary responsibility was to earn the family income. He spent time at his London office in Pancras Lane and, on several occasions, traveled to South Africa to attend to his interests there. Henry spent much of his time at Oakfield, but, despite his ostensible role as head of his family, he is an elusive entity in Maynard’s memories of childhood.24 His niece, Mary King, remembers Henry as of “a nervous temper that could not endure the restlessness of early childhood.”25 If Henry was absent from the nursery and schoolroom, he remained only a peripheral figure during his children’s adolescence. Maynard’s primary contact with her father in those years occurred during walks to the village church several times a week. These outings were not, however, discussed by Maynard at any length in her journals, and Henry is not a substantive presence in Maynard’s autobiographical account of childhood, her diaries or in King’s recollections of her
Louisa Maynard, on the other hand, was very influential within her home. Her duties revolved around the maintenance of Oakfield and the upbringing of her children. Despite regular illnesses dating from Dora’s birth in 1846, which left her in pain and incapable of leaving the house for days at a time, within her “sphere of influence” Louisa Maynard had a substantial and pervasive influence on the education and socialization of her children. King, a regular guest at Oakfield and observer of the young lives of the “spirited” Maynard children, recalled that Louisa had “clear and decided” principles according to which her children were to be brought up:

Other influences unavoidably came in and yet they never could greatly modify the firmly fixed lines laid down by her steadfast will, wise judgment and loving heart, so that certain family characteristics remain common to [all the children]. She aimed high and she was wonderfully successful, everyone adopting her principles, in slightly varying degrees.\(^{26}\)

According to King, if Henry Maynard had a limited role in the Maynard nursery and schoolroom, Louisa’s commitment to raising her children with particular beliefs and values ensured that her husband’s influence would not be missed.

Louisa Maynard’s influence on the lives of her young children, and Henry Maynard’s relative absence, demonstrates that conflict remarked upon recently by scholars of modern British society, between the actual roles taken by men and women within the Victorian family unit, and the rhetorical ideals to which middle-class Victorian families were imagined to subscribe.\(^{27}\) Middle-class families supposedly upheld the vision of separate masculine and feminine spheres of influence and the characteristics associated with ‘ideal’ conceptions of masculinity and femininity. However, middle-class
masculine respectability was maintained by appropriate feminine behaviour, and a man’s success in the public sphere was contingent on the success of his private life.\textsuperscript{28}

As James Hammerton has argued, feminine submission to male authority in marriage was emphasized and perpetuated by prescriptive literature and dominant social attitudes throughout the late-nineteenth century, but reflected ideological and political values more than the lived experience of married women in Victorian society. The new ideals of companionate love challenged the supremacy of male authority within marriage and the family.\textsuperscript{29} Married women’s influence was restricted to the family home but, as the nineteenth century progressed, was increasingly pervasive and firm within that sphere. Wives and mothers possessed a moral authority which challenged the patriarchal authority of their husbands.

In the Maynard household, it is clear that maternal authority was especially prevalent. Responsibility for the maintenance of Oakfield and for the bringing up of the children fell squarely on Louisa. Both Maynard’s and Mary King’s accounts of the dynamics in the Maynard home indicate that Louisa was the primary influence in her children’s lives, and the principal authority figure as well. Despite the Maynards’ employment of a series of nurses and governesses to care for the children, it was Louisa who, according to her youngest daughter, “guided our steps and inspired us to learn and to do.” It was their mother whom the Maynard children regarded as “our standard in all things.” That degree of influence derived, in part, from Louisa’s willingness to wield overt authority over her children. Discipline in the Maynard nursery was strict. According to Maynard, Louisa “never petted...and seldom even caressed” her children.\textsuperscript{30} Neither was Louisa tolerant of the petty squabbles of childhood. King recalled that in
“the nursery and School-room all teasing and quarrelling were suppressed on the instant” of a stern word or glance from Louisa.\(^{31}\)

According to both Maynard and King, Louisa’s religious convictions were responsible for the level of discipline she maintained in the schoolroom. Louisa Maynard’s life was pervaded by her sense of religious duty and reverence for God, as set down by “the Protestant, Puritan, and Huguenot attitude” she shared with her husband.\(^{32}\)

In her autobiography, Maynard described her mother’s belief in “the soul rising out of the vanity of time into the riches of eternity.”\(^{33}\) According to King, Louisa’s emphasis on spiritual over worldly considerations meant that she valued the principles of “Unworldliness, Simplicity of Life, Industry, Cheerfulness, Independence of judgment of others, willing Obedience and Contentment” in her children.\(^{34}\) In similar terms, Maynard recalls that her mother endeavoured “unremittingly year after year to bring us to a humble, teachable, unworldly” character.\(^{35}\) Louisa taught her children that they were to live and to strive for eternal life. The precedence of eternal over material life was clear to Maynard who felt she suffered from the effects of Louisa’s “positive scorn on the world’s dress, amusements, and fashions.”\(^{36}\) Louisa Maynard “pointed out with forcible illustrations the folly of conformity,” and was supported “in a much milder quieter way,” by her husband. Maynard argues that the unity of their parents’ religious ideals and convictions, and Louisa’s emphasis on those beliefs as guiding principles for her children’s upbringing, left the Maynard children with a limited scope of what was to be valued and appreciated in secular life.\(^{37}\) It is apparent in Maynard’s journals and in her autobiography that friendships outside the family were not cultivated. The Maynard children did not attend parties, dances or teas. Constance Maynard and her siblings were
close to one another and to their relatives but their interactions with their neighbours in Hawkhurst predominantly involved charitable works rather than social engagements.  

There is a sense throughout the autobiography and in her diaries that Maynard envied and was inspired by the strength of her mother’s religious convictions. She had, however, conflicting feelings about what effect Louisa’s beliefs had on the upbringing of the Maynard children. Louisa’s principles restricted the Maynard children’s participation in social life and coloured their perceptions of the secular world. Ultimately, Maynard found that because of her parents’ religious sensibilities, “nothing simple and attractive was put before” herself or her siblings. For her, this was “a great pity, for we were so ready, so very ready to receive it [Maynard’s emphasis].” To Maynard’s obvious frustration, her mother’s authority was far-reaching in the religious and social lives of her sons and daughters. Louisa Maynard was an example to her children, not of feminine submission, but of maternal and moral authority.

Louisa Maynard’s control over the lives of her children illustrates the contradictory role of mothers in late-Victorian society. Much of the scholarship on the Victorian family has focused on the influential role of the father in the lives of his children. In predominant definitions of parental roles, Victorian fathers were supposed to “embody…moral and intellectual authority” in their children’s lives. However, John Tosh has demonstrated how significant elements of the Victorian father’s role changed over the nineteenth century. The ability to discipline and the responsibility to educate children, two defining features of parental duty, shifted from the father to the mother in late Victorian society. The expanding scope of a mother’s role, her growing responsibility to discipline and educate her children did not, however, change the rhetoric
which opposed authority and femininity.\textsuperscript{43} Women were supposed to have moral and affective authority, not disciplinary or punitive power. Yet evidence from Constance Maynard’s writings reveals that Victorian women could potentially wield substantial authority over their children. In Maynard’s recollections of childhood, it is Louisa Maynard, not her husband, who is the principle “moral and intellectual authority” in the lives of her both her daughters and her sons. Indeed, a growing historiography recognizes that maternal influence within the home presented an important challenge to idealized conceptions of gender roles, and created tensions between family ideals and the lived experience of Victorian families.\textsuperscript{44} While families like the Maynards may outwardly have conformed to prescribed gender roles, there is ample evidence that the relationships between middle-class Victorian mothers and their children, between children and their fathers, indeed, between the adult members of the household, challenged the simple roles imposed upon them by the Victorian rhetoric of separate spheres.\textsuperscript{45}

**Louisa Maynard and the Education of Her Children**

Louisa Maynard’s influence and authority was particularly evident regarding the education of her children. The Maynard children’s early schooling was carried out under Louisa’s constant supervision. Even Henry deferred to Louisa’s opinions regarding when, where and how the children’s education would be carried out. With the help of a series of governesses, Louisa taught each child, both the boys and girls, at home until they were of an age to be sent away to school. There is no evidence that, while at home, the education received by Harry and George differed from the education provided to their
sisters. Rather, it appears as though a wide range of activities and lessons were available to all of the Maynard children, and that, at least sometimes, it was a matter of personal choice as to which subject they would pursue. According to Mary King, whose “Reminiscences” provide the best account of the education received by the Maynard children in their youth, the children’s interests were indulged in a varied field:

They had books and teachers, a beautiful binocular microscope, and a good telescope. They had easels and paints, a lay-figure, an aquarium and a printing-press, and a whole room set aside for a carpenter’s bench and turning-lathe and the best of tools; Dora and George worked there at spare times for some years and produced some very pretty work...The casts, the modeling-clay and the colours downstairs, were always the chief attraction to Gabrielle and Constance.46

According to King, her cousins’ education included the reading of bible stories, although bibles for private reading were not permitted to any of the children until they were at least twelve years old.47 The children were also exposed to non-religious subjects including poetry, maths, geography, music and a number of languages.48 Nevertheless, Louisa’s strict beliefs and scorn of worldly considerations ultimately affected the character and content of her children’s education. This is particularly evident in the type of reading material available in the Maynard household. The otherwise liberal education provided the Maynard children while they were at home lacked one substantial element: the reading of novels was prohibited. Maynard recalls her mother reading several “ancient” novels of her own, mostly the works of Sir Walter Scott, to herself and her siblings.49 Throughout her young life Maynard notes that her reading was “one-sided in its character,” consisting of mostly history and religious texts. This, Maynard argues, served to limit the scope of her imagination and her appreciation for literature.50
While the education received in the Maynard household may not have been ideal according to Constance Maynard, neither parental indifference nor repressive religious beliefs would prevent the Maynard girls from receiving formal schooling. Harry and George would leave for school at an earlier age and for a longer period of time, but each of the Maynard girls was also sent away to school. Eventually, Constance, Josephine, Gabrielle and Dora would all be sent to Belstead, a “small private school in Brighton” with just thirty students, under the guidance of Mrs. Umpleby and her daughter. At Maynard’s birth, her eldest sister, Josephine, was already in attendance at Belstead. Like many adolescent girls with younger siblings, once they had completed their schooling at Belstead, Josephine and Gabrielle were responsible for the continued tutelage of their siblings. Once her oldest children reached adulthood, Louisa relinquished some of her control over the schoolroom. King recalled that by her late adolescence Josephine was in charge of the Maynard schoolroom. The fall of 1859 through the winter of 1860, when Constance Maynard was ten years old, marked the first time that all of the Maynard children, except Josephine, would be away from home: “Gazy [Gabrielle] was sent to Belstead, and Dora and Consie [Constance] to the Isle of Wight to a former governess, Madame Merile de Colville, and George in the autumn of 1860 to a little school in Brighton.” Maynard and her sister Dora would stay only a few months with Madame de Colville. In the Spring of 1860, Dora would join Gabrielle at Belstead and Maynard would be left at home. As the youngest, throughout her childhood Maynard endured the loss of all of her siblings to an assortment of private tutors and schools before she, herself, would leave Oakfield to attend Belstead in the fall of 1863.

Education was of great importance in the Maynard household. In addition, it was
through her decisions and expectations about education that Louisa Maynard exercised the most profound influence over her children. The Maynard schoolroom provided the primary location for Louisa's strict discipline and behavioural requirements for Constance Maynard and her siblings. On the education of her children, Louisa's authority was final. Just as her authority in the schoolroom influenced the behaviour and pursuits of all six children, Louisa also treated each child as equally capable of academic achievement regardless of his or her sex. Even with regard to restrictions in the schoolroom, there is the appearance of relative equality in the education available at home among all of the Maynard children. Josephine, Gabrielle, Dora, and Constance received instruction in the sciences, maths, and languages alongside their brothers. Harry and George were restricted from reading novels as were their sisters. Many histories of middle-class Victorian childhood argue that childhood's end and boys' departure for preparatory schools marked the end of any parity in educational opportunities granted male and female children. In the Maynard household, however, the extent of Louisa Maynard's authority, influence and expectations for the education of her children ensured that the Maynard girls were never treated as inferior to, or different from, their brothers.

The Self-Student

Before Constance Maynard left Oakfield for school, she had to endure the absence of all of her siblings from home. According to Maynard, it was difficult to watch her sisters depart for Belstead knowing that "they went off to a crowd of friends and a
wide scope of interests” while she returned to a house empty of all inhabitants but her parents. The three years between Dora’s departure for Belstead and her own were years of independent study for Maynard. The Maynard family did not employ a governess to teach their last child at home. With only Maynard left in the schoolroom, Louisa’s preoccupation with her children’s education also waned somewhat. According to Maynard, while Louisa “saw me everyday, read the bible with me...[she also] called me her ‘Self-Student,’ and said I must now read and work by myself, and not by compulsion but voluntarily.” Although “nothing very definite was proposed,” Maynard made use of the resources on hand, including a volume of poems by Longfellow and a map of the stars, gifts from her brother George, to set a study schedule for herself.

Maynard’s descriptions of the years before she began attending Belstead reveal her growing awareness of her own interests and desires, and the discontent caused by the incompatibility she perceived between those interests and her family life. Maynard expressed frustration at these quiet and often lonely years. The introspection and self-reflection required by her Evangelical faith contributed to a growing sense of conflict: “There comes a time when the passive, receptive state of mind comes to an end, and one begins to look round on one’s circumstances as an agent, possessing choice.” The contradiction between being an “agent, possessing choice” and the dutiful daughter, was difficult to overcome. In her autobiography Maynard wrote of her growing independence, “so completely was I imbued with submission to the will of those above me, that I took the first steps with extreme hesitation, like one groping in the dark, and ready to draw back at any instant.”

Maynard’s crisis reflects larger contradictions in Victorian society and within the
Victorian family. Single daughters found themselves in an ambiguous position within both society and family life. Significant contradictions apparent within prescriptive notions of Victorian femininity by the later decades of the nineteenth century were particularly relevant to the experience of single women.  

For instance, the Victorian preoccupation with biological determinism coincided with an increasingly individualistic and egalitarian conception of social organization. As the nineteenth century progressed, women's perceived biological inferiority to men conflicted with the notion that individual ability and achievement were based on merit, not biology.  

In addition, Victorian women were heralded for their maternal, domestic and moral role. Upheld as "Angels in the House," women were viewed as the bedrock of society, morally superior to men, and responsible for both the maintenance and conveyance of the values of their entire society. The roles of wife and mother unavailable to them, single women were expected to remain subservient to their parents, and were rhetorically condemned to marginal and 'redundant' roles in society and within the family home. Yet, at the same time, single Victorian women were gaining legal and economic rights, and laying "claim...to opportunities previously reserved for men."  

These contradictions affected gender dynamics within Victorian families like the Maynards' and linked challenges to prescribed roles and relations within the home with challenges to the social status quo. Henry and Louisa had provided their girls with intellectual training, and had not distinguished between the rights and responsibilities of their sons and daughters. The character of her education and her mother's profound authority in her life compounded Constance Maynard's increasingly complicated relationship to her family and to the society in which she lived. Unmarried daughters
were bound by familial and affective ties to male authority. Outside of the family unit, without the expectations and restrictions imposed by the role of wife and mother, however, patriarchal authority exerted less control over single women. Single daughters like Maynard, therefore, held an unspecified and problematic position within the Victorian family and within society. Maynard's crisis of identity was a result of growing discrepancies between ideal constructions of women's roles and behaviours, and the realities facing single women in Victorian society. It was founded in the gender relations modeled within her family home, and reflected the ambiguous position of single, middle-class women within Victorian society.

Reflecting on her childhood later in her life, Maynard was harshly critical of the situation her parents provided for her in her years at home. She would complain that "it is a pity when an eager, half-awakened soul such as mine is left with so little material to work upon. No newspapers were read, no politics talked over at meals, no books discussed or great questions broached." The dissatisfaction Maynard expressed at her life at home may indicate the stagnation and conservatism which so many authors find in the late-Victorian family home. However, Constance Maynard suffered as much from being the last child at home as she did from living in a family insensitive to the intellectual needs of their daughters. Had Maynard been born before any of her sisters, it is likely that she would have enjoyed the same stimulus from her siblings and the employ of governesses and tutors, as they did before being sent away to school.
Belstead

For Constance Maynard, Belstead provided the opportunity to explore new interests and to experience new relationships in an environment different from the Maynard home. Yet, according to Maynard, Belstead did not stimulate her intellect. She recalled the student population as “not a clever set, and...not encouraged to be so.” In his biography of the Maynard family, C. B. Firth describes Belstead as being a very different environment from the Maynard home. According to Firth, Mrs. Umpleby and her daughter ran the school like a family, and treated the girls with an open affection not often displayed by Louisa Maynard or her husband. Indeed, Firth is surprised by the Maynards’ choice of Belstead as the appropriate school for their daughters for this reason. However, it was less Belstead’s character than the experience of leaving the structured, often rigid Maynard household, which engendered in Maynard a sense of freedom she had not experienced at home: “as soon as I got away to Belstead a sort of pressure was lifted off me, and I could be myself.”

If the warmth and compassion demonstrated by Mrs. Umpleby lead Firth to question Henry and Louisa Maynard’s choice of Belstead as a school for their daughters, the very decision to send the four girls to any school was exceptional and had implications beyond the girls’ social and emotional lives. Schools for middle-class girls were rare. In late nineteenth century Britain, girls’ schooling, especially when girls lived away from home, was implicated in the potential subversion of “appropriate” gender roles in the family and in society at large. Henry and Louisa Maynard sent their four daughters to Belstead in the midst of the debates over the merit of women’s education. It was an
an unusual decision in light of contemporary evidence about the nature of women’s schooling in Victorian Britain and the ideological implications of educating women.

Although upper class girls and young women had traditionally been educated at home under the tutelage of governesses, and various forms of education for lower class children existed throughout the nineteenth century, schools for the daughters of middle-class families were a recent invention in the late-Victorian period. Two commissions into the state of education in Great Britain were executed by the government in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Newcastle commission of 1822 inquired into the nature of popular and poor schools in England and Wales, while the Clarendon Commission in 1828 examined the state of Britain’s twelve principal boys’ schools for members of the upper classes. Not until December of 1864, however, was a royal commission appointed to “inquire into the education given in schools not comprised within her majesty’s two former commissions.”

The inquiry lead by Councillor Henry, Baron Taunton, was intended to gauge the state of English education for the middle-classes as it existed by the second half of the nineteenth century. The Report, which was published in 1868, made recommendations for what middle-class schooling should be “in order to meet the needs of the country and the wishes of the parents.” In the first chapter of its report, the Taunton commission calculated the number of students in England and Wales who would fall under the scope of its inquiry. The commissioners estimated that their recommendations would provide school places for ten out of every one-thousand boys in England between the ages of twelve and eighteen, or one percent of the adolescent male population. They concluded that “a materially smaller” number of girls would fall under their domain.
Frances Buss and Emily Davies were among two of the prominent female educators who petitioned the Taunton commission to include an examination of girls' schools in their inquiry despite the small proportion of girls affected. An inquiry into girls' schooling would be difficult, according to the commissioners, who confirmed that "girls are much more often educated at home, or in schools too small to be entitled to the name." As a result, the commissioners found far fewer girls' than boys' schools on which to report. In addition, the girls' schools examined were found to be unsatisfactory more often than were the boys' schools. The Taunton commissioners observed a "general deficiency in girls' education," supported by the testimony of "many witnesses of authority" who appeared before the commission. Specifically, the commissioners found middle-class girls' schools to be inconsistent, too small to provide adequate instruction in all subjects, too expensive, and under the direction of women not equal to the job of teaching others.

The Taunton commissioners discerned in British society a general "want of motive power' to stimulate intellectual exertion on the part of girls," and concluded that the "main obstacle" to improving the state of middle-class education for girls was the "apathy and want of cooperation, often the active opposition" of parents. Parental indifference, they argued, was to blame for the haphazard organization and poor quality of girls' schooling. In declaring parents responsible for the inconsistent quality of girls' schooling, however, the Taunton Commissioners neglected to explain the fact that, by the later decades of the nineteenth century, the number of girls' schools were on the rise. W. B. Stephens, in his exhaustive survey of England's school system in the second half of the nineteenth century, argues that the increase in the number of schools throughout the
country and corresponding increase in school attendance cannot be explained solely "in
terms of increased supply" on the part of those running the institutions. Since schooling
was neither free nor compulsory until the end of the century, he argues, increased demand
for educational institutions across all classes, and for students of both sexes, was
motivated by the desires of parents and students. Stephens is the first to admit, however,
that increasing "parental demand is simpler to demonstrate than to explain."\textsuperscript{73}

The association between girls' schooling and the subversion of "appropriate"

gender roles for women recurred throughout the Taunton Commission Report and was
prevalent in Victorian social commentary. As a result, parental decisions to send girls to
school in the Victorian period is particularly difficult to explain. Girls' schooling,
according to the commissioners and many of their witnesses, especially when girls lived
away from home, had the potential to disrupt the balance between the public and private,

male and female, worlds. The creation of appropriate feminine character was of

particular concern to most educators of women. The middle-class home, not the school

environment, was supposed to best reflect and model the ideals of Victorian femininity

genre girls. Therefore, many educators preferred a closer relationship between institutional

schooling and family influence than was provided by schools where students lived away.

The Taunton commissioners believed that the education of girls was best carried

out in "family-like," day-schools as "in the case of girls more than in that of boys the

combination of school teaching with home influence, such as Day Schools admit of, is the

most promising arrangement."\textsuperscript{74} Dorothea Beale, Headmistress at Cheltenham Ladies'

College, was a prominent and outspoken Victorian educator and proponent of women's

higher education. She was also one of the educators to give evidence for the 1868
Schools Inquiry Commission. In an 1865 address to the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, Beale declared that she preferred girls’ schools to “combine home life with school discipline.” In that situation, she argued, girls would have the opportunity of “observing character before...called upon to judge in the battle of life, whilst parents are able to correct what is wrong, and to confirm what is right in those judgments.” 75

Whereas girls were better served by education which combined schooling with the influence of family life, boarding schools were preferred as a more “efficient” manner to both educate and socialize boys. 76 As Bonnie Smith has argued, boys’ schools were supposed to provide their students with a marked contrast from the home life they left behind. The scientific objectivity promoted in academic institutions, even for young boys, was contrasted with the emotion and irrationality of life at home. Boys’ schools were designed to be “antidomestic” environments. According to Smith, however, the nature of the school environment contributed to the understanding that scholarship was an inherently male pursuit. 77 In its association with the male world, removal from family life and potential to prepare women for economic independence, schooling was inherently subversive for women. Boarding schools were an “efficient” environment for the education of boys because they removed all feminine influence from male students. For the same reason, they were deemed detrimental to the education and socialization of girls.

The reservations the Taunton Commissioners and many of their witnesses had regarding girls’ boarding schools demonstrated the general apprehension over the potentially subversive nature of women’s education. Girls’ schooling was problematic for a society which painted women only as wives and mothers and defined itself on the
basis of differentiated gender roles and relations. If girls had to be sent away to school, Belstead was the kind of school which the commissioners and their expert witnesses could endorse. The Taunton commissioners believed that smaller, private schools for women "tend[ed] more to the production and confirmation of gentle and feminine character" than did larger institutions. Beale declared that she was in favour of girls being educated at colleges, as long as "the moral training of the pupils [was] in the hands of a lady." Victorian connotations of the word 'lady' extended well beyond sex. In this context, a "lady" conformed to Victorian feminine ideals, upheld those ideals among her acquaintance, and held a certain class advantage within society. Mrs. Umpleby, although not wealthy, was a respectable member of middle-class society. Belstead - small, family-like, and under the guidance of Mrs. Umpleby and her daughter - fitted the criteria considered appropriate for the proper education of middle-class Victorian girls.

The family model of schooling was supposed to be a remedy for the subversive elements of girls' schooling. The belief that institutional schooling, if pursued apart from familial influence, had the potential to subvert Victorian values and attitudes about appropriate gender roles was widely held in Victorian society. The fact that the Victorian family, even a surrogate family in the shape of a small, family-like school, could help to assimilate the subversive elements of girls' schooling into the social status quo reinforced the conservative view of the Victorian family. If girls' schools were a threat to Victorian gender ideals and social mores, families provided a defence against social change. The Victorian family was imagined to be untroubled by the tensions increasingly apparent in Victorian gender relations.

Despite the Taunton commissioners' belief in both parental indifference and
active opposition to girls’ education, and a general concern over schooling’s subversive influence on women, Henry and Louisa Maynard sought out educational opportunities for all four of their daughters. In deciding to send Maynard and her sisters away to school, indeed, in the educational decisions made within the Maynard home, the Maynards made a conscious decision to socialize and educate their children in an atypical way. Whether they considered their decisions subversive is questionable. However, given the prevalence of the discussion over the state of women’s education, it is difficult to imagine Henry and Louisa’s complete ignorance of the implications of their decision to send their four daughters to Belstead.

**Seven Years at Home**

After barely a year and a half at Belstead, Constance Maynard returned to Oakfield in January of 1865 and began the task of “settling into the life of a grown up daughter.” For Maynard, however, this situation was often as trying as her three years without her sisters had been. Maynard wrote of her years at home that “as far as mental and spiritual development are concerned I cannot separate the one year from the other.”80 Her diaries from 1866 to 1871 reveal a quiet existence of reading, writing, taking refuge in walks on the Oakfield property, visiting neighbours and family and spending time *en famille*.

In comparison to her time at Belstead, Maynard found the activities and interests available to her at Oakfield to be limited. As in the case of other upper middle-class families, the Maynard girls were not responsible for helping to run the household.81
Indeed, Maynard stated in her autobiography that she "had practically no responsibility" except to fill her own time productively. She notes that reading and drawing were her chief pursuits during the seven years at home, and she devoted many hours to those endeavours. According to Maynard, while Josephine had friends and pursued interests independent of her family, socialization with other young people was limited for Constance Maynard and her two other sisters. Indeed, Louisa’s dismissal of worldly considerations, according to Maynard, meant that many of the privileges of upper middle-class life were denied the Maynard girls:

No season in London, of course, but not even parties at home, no games or mixing with our own kind where "youth salutes youth," no friendships, no distant possibilities of love-affairs, no novels by which to learn what others thought of life, even if we might not touch it ourselves.82

The Maynard girls’ return to Oakfield ended the independence they had enjoyed at Belstead and heralded a renewal of Louisa Maynard’s restrictions on their behaviour.

In the face of limitations on their acquaintance, interest and activities, Constance, Gabrielle and Dora continued to pursue their education independently. Organized by nature, the Maynard sisters “made time tables of the hours for reading and learning and drawing, and at the end of each week counted how much had been done.”83 Maynard, who considered her artistic talents lacking when compared to those of her sisters, preferred to spend time reading poetry, which was not prohibited by Louisa.84 Despite having relative control over the use of their time, Maynard’s autobiography and diaries reveal the power of Louisa Maynard’s influence in the lives of her teenaged and young adult daughters. Louisa’s aversion to “any sort of discontent, or languor, or dreaminess,” according to Maynard, resulted in “a slightly artificial behaviour” in her daughters.
Maynard felt she could not show her mother her "real self because it would be despised." The Maynard sisters' industrious and studious use of time in the years following their return from Belstead was, in part, motivated by the pressure of Louisa's expectations for her daughters' behaviour. However, the importance Constance Maynard herself placed on her studies, art and reading is clear throughout her autobiography and diaries. Indeed, she marked the progress of her years in the books read, drawings drawn and time spent on various academic and written pursuits, as much as by the places she had visited and people seen. Her diary entry for December 31st 1871 provided an inventory of her time spent in that year:


A time to take stock, the end of each year found Maynard reflecting on her life at Oakfield. She often mused, as she did on December 31st of 1870, that "the year has not made much difference to my mind."

Louisa's control over the lives of her grown daughters is exemplified in her continued restriction on their reading novels, a source of particular contention for Maynard. As women in their late-teens and early twenties, Maynard recalled that she and her sisters read a great deal on the subject of history and religion, yet novels continued to be prohibited. Maynard was critical of her parents' decision to restrict the reading of novels. She claimed that "there was far too much...of one thing," in her
reading material, and argued that the "parts of one's nature that are starved either die and impoverish the whole, or else revenge themselves later." Maynard's writings demonstrate the level of importance reading played in her young life. Louisa's restrictions, therefore, were particularly significant to Maynard and evidence of the clash between Maynard's own desires and interests and her mother's authority.

Maynard expressed a general sense of discontent at her home life throughout her autobiography and journals. From the reading material allowed the girls, to the restriction of their activities outside the home, Louisa exerted a level of influence and authority that Maynard resented. The effects of Louisa's religious beliefs on Maynard's experience in the family home was a growing source of conflict as Maynard grew older. Louisa Maynard's emphasis on the precedence of spiritual over material life drastically limited her daughters' social lives and restricted the activities and interests they could pursue. In addition, while reading through her journals in researching her autobiography Maynard was distressed by the nature and extent of her adolescent reflections on religion. She argued that, for her, the "constant introspection" promoted by her mother "had undeniably a morbid and undesirable side." Of her mother's religious teachings she concludes that theory and doctrine were given me by the pound, and the corresponding practice inculcated by the ounce...It is all right, all valid, but the intellectual side is supreme...the aim put before us was to learn self-control; and I think the education was far too successful.

Henry and Louisa Maynard's emphasis on religious doctrine over good works or participation in the church community compounded the effects of Louisa's "fear of the 'the world.'" The emphasis on religious contemplation was problematic for Maynard in her youth since it prevented her from looking outside her own reading or reflection for
religious fulfillment. While her sisters were involved in charitable works throughout the
Hawkhurst neighbourhood, Maynard, instead, spent many hours reading religious texts
and pondering her place in the world. This private contemplation, she found, limited the
scope of her beliefs and prevented her participation in a wider religious community.

In her autobiography Constance Maynard blamed her mother’s religious beliefs
for the restriction and repression she experienced at Oakfield. Recent scholarship linking
Evangelical religious conviction and the pursuit of women’s education in nineteenth
century Britain, however, indicates that Louisa Maynard’s Evangelical beliefs may,
ultimately, have been responsible for her progressive decisions regarding the education of
Maynard and her sisters. Evangelical religious groups were associated with a variety of
political and social movements within Victorian society and were especially concerned
with the state of Britain’s education system. Because women were considered to be the
guardians of society’s morals and values, the inadequate system of women’s education in
the Victorian period was perceived by many Evangelical leaders as incompatible with
Britain’s ultimate spiritual and moral growth.92 The Maynard family were Evangelical
Christians, but they were relatively isolated from the larger religious community and there
is no evidence in either Maynard or King’s writings of the Maynards’ involvement in
social or political movements. Neither Maynard or King explicitly associate Louisa
Maynard’s religion with the education taking place in the Maynard home, making it
impossible to draw a definitive connection between her Evangelical beliefs and her
decision to educate Constance Maynard and her sisters. Given the pervasive influence
Louisa’s religious convictions had in the Maynard home, however, it is likely that
religion did effect decisions regarding the education of the Maynard children. In light of
Maynard’s displeasure with the effect that her parent’s religious beliefs had on her upbringing and education and the joy she derived while at school, it is interesting to consider that, had it not been for those Evangelical beliefs, Constance Maynard might never have been educated at all.

In 1915, Maynard read excerpts from her as yet unfinished autobiography to Gabrielle and Dora. She claims that both sisters were amazed by Maynard’s recollections of their having been, in her words, “‘Panther[s] in the Cage.’” Gabrielle provided her sister with her own diaries of those same years, which, according to Maynard, read like the diary of “the positively ideal ‘Girl at Home.’” Maynard’s use of the two terms is significant. Single women lacked an ascribed role in Victorian society or within the Victorian family. According to Martha Vicinus, because it was an ambiguous role, being an unmarried woman was a potentially flexible position within the rigid structure of Victorian society. Yet, dominant social ideologies condemned single daughters to a trivial social role. They were expected to remain at home, subservient to the authority of, and, eventually, caring for, their aging parents. Some unmarried daughters did conform to this ideal. According to Gabrielle’s diaries, she happily strove to meet her parents’ expectations. She helped with her youngest sisters’ education, spent her spare time reading and studying, and carried out charitable work in the Hawkhurst neighbourhood. According to Maynard, Gabrielle derived great pleasure in being useful to her parents.

Gabrielle may have been the ideal “girl at home,” but being an unmarried, adult daughter in the middle-class, Victorian family was problematic for many young women. Because of their unspecified place in ideal conceptions of gender roles and relationships, single women were the subjects of debate and concern. The degree of that concern is
demonstrated in the vast array of prescriptive literature which emerged in the Victorian period to help single daughters negotiate their uncomfortable position. Most of this literature was written specifically for an audience of young, middle-class girls and women and often took the form of cautionary and moral tales. Mary King recalled that Louisa Maynard gave her a book entitled *Anna: Passages in the Life of a Daughter at Home* when she left school to return to her parents’ home. King described the book as “of the greatest use to...myself,” in the period immediately following her school leaving. While religious in nature, the purpose of a book like *Anna* was, explicitly, to reinforce women’s submission to parental authority, their duty toward their family and inherent moral role in society.

King recalled sharing *Anna* with her cousin when Maynard left Belstead, and noted that she had hoped to provide Maynard with the same solace she had found in the book’s pages. King sympathized with her cousin’s situation as a single, educated daughter returning home from school. Her desire to instruct and console Maynard indicated an understanding that being a single woman in the Victorian home was a situation requiring guidance. Indeed, Maynard had a difficult relationship to family life. Her overall impression of home is one of restriction and repression. She was forced to submit to her mother’s strong will and felt unable to adequately express herself or pursue the activities and interests she desired. The tasks that Gabrielle engaged in out of pleasure, Maynard performed out of duty. Her assessment of her role in her parents’ home, therefore, differs significantly from Gabrielle’s. Both sisters, however, like many other single women in Victorian society, confronted a social world which offered no role for them except a limited one in the family home. Women like Gabrielle worked within
the restrictions society placed on them, and took on the role of "daughter at home."

Others, like Maynard, found themselves in an increasingly uncomfortable position within their home and Victorian society.

1872

Constance Maynard was extensively involved in a variety of academic and artistic pursuits in the years following her departure from Belstead. As she grew older, however, she was increasingly dissatisfied with her marginal and constricted role in the Maynard home. The winter of 1871, heralded the beginning of events and circumstances which would act as catalysts for change in Maynard’s life. In February of that year Maynard received news that Mrs. Umpleby, her former teacher at Belstead, had taken ill and died. Maynard described her feeling at the news as "winter in my heart." The months that followed Mrs. Umpleby’s death were difficult for Maynard, who was increasingly restless at home. For a change of scene, Henry and Louisa sent their youngest daughter to visit her Aunt Amelia Campbell in St. Andrew’s, Scotland. Maynard, who found a happiness in Scotland she had never before experienced away from Oakfield, would return to her Aunt’s home a second time in early 1872. There she was exposed to a wider circle of young people and more personal freedom than she felt she had at home. Maynard’s cousin Lewis Campbell, who taught at the local university, was a significant influence on Maynard during her visits to St. Andrew’s. According to Maynard, who placed great importance on her cousin’s opinion of her, Campbell found her “narrow” with regard to
the world.” In her diary, she recalled a significant conversation with him in which they discussed the difference between the atmosphere she found in St. Andrew’s and the one Maynard was used to at Oakfield:

“This has been a very worldly atmosphere for you, dear” [he said] - It was a difficult thing to answer but I said something about being “different at home,” and he said, “Well we will say Secular.” Secular it was certainly, and sometimes worldly, but the delightful brightness and warmth and intellect of which there is so large a proportion at St. A seemed to me to take off from that chilliness or that mere trifling which oppresses me as the very spirit of this world.103

After many years at home, prejudiced by Louisa’s scorn of material considerations, Maynard was surprised to find pleasure in the secular sphere her cousins inhabited in St. Andrew’s. Like her life at Belstead, however, Maynard’s experiences in Scotland contrasted sharply with the strict religiosity of life awaiting her at home.

Upon her return from St. Andrews, Maynard was acutely aware of the limited scope of her role in the Maynard household. Her aspirations and interests were broadened in Scotland. At Oakfield, however, Maynard continued to be constrained by the role of “daughter at home.” On April 14, 1872 she wrote in her Green-book

My mind is full of new thoughts and feelings and desires...I had hoped that to come home meant to return to peace and quiet reading and prayer, but of course I carry myself with me, and if I have spoilt myself at St. Andrews...I must feel it even more distinctly now where all outside one is the same as before.104

Henry and Louisa Maynard, recognizing their youngest daughter’s conflict, agreed to allow Maynard to meet with Emily Davies, the headmistress of Girton College, the first women’s college at Cambridge University. Maynard had learned of Hitchin, as Girton was called in its earliest days, from Lewis Campbell.
Women's schooling was problematic for those who opposed the education of women because it provided single women, like Maynard, with a ready escape from their narrow and restricted role in the family and in Victorian society. Women's colleges provided single, middle-class Victorian women with a community where they could establish a productive role for themselves besides that of wife and mother. To some individuals in Victorian society the subversion of proper gender roles and relations believed to take place in girls' schools and women's colleges was considered a motivating factor for educating women. Emily Davies was a committed enthusiast of the women's education movement in the mid and late-Victorian period; she endorsed schooling's subversive influence on the ideologies underpinning Victorian society and was convinced that only through education could women gain equal footing in society with men. To Davies, Victorian parents stood in the way of women's academic pursuits and actively resisted endeavours to alter the status of women in Victorian society. Indeed, Davies believed that women's education might produce the "modifications" to home life necessary to "bring it into happier relations with the circumstances of modern society." While Davies believed firmly in the Victorian family's social conservatism, evidence from Constance Maynard's experience challenges this assessment. Henry and Louisa Maynard provided both their daughters and their sons with childhood educational opportunities. As adolescents all four Maynard girls were sent away to school. Even in the structure of parental roles in the Maynard home, and in decisions like sending an obviously restless Maynard to St. Andrew's and allowing her to meet with Emily Davies, Henry and Louisa demonstrated an open-mindedness which Davies does not permit in her judgment of Victorian parents.
Indeed, the events of the months following Maynard's return from Scotland prove that Henry and Louisa Maynard ran a more liberal household than that with which they were credited by contemporary proponents of women's education, or by Maynard. In mid-May of 1872, Henry Maynard accompanied his youngest daughter to London where she met with Davies. At the meeting Maynard was impressed by Hitchin's curriculum and discovered that the name of one of her fellow students from Belstead, Conny Herschel, was on the school roster for October of 1873. While there is little mention in her diaries or Green-books of her parents' decision to allow her to sit the entrance exams at Cambridge, it needs to be emphasized that Henry and Louisa agreed to allow Maynard to attend one year at Hitchin. Indeed, Maynard found that her request "was more kindly received" than she had anticipated. Eventually, her parents allowed her to complete her degree at Girton. In her autobiography, Maynard recalled with greater detail the manner in which her parents had consented to the idea. Maynard first approached her father with the request to go because "Father was always easier than Mother to manage when a request was on hand." Henry agreed to pay for Maynard's college education for one year. His advice to Maynard, however, reinforced the notion that his wife was the last authority with regard to her daughters' education: "the Mother knows more about it all than I do. If you can get her consent, the bills shall be paid." Louisa did agree, and in June of 1872 Maynard sat for the entrance exams at Cambridge. Her journal entry for June 29th states merely "I have passed."

Their decision to allow Maynard to attend Girton College exemplifies the unconventional nature of Henry and Louisa Maynard's choices regarding the education of their daughters. If sending girls to boarding school was unusual, it was exceptional to
allow a daughter to attend college in the late-Victorian period. Indeed, Constance Maynard would be among the first women in England to receive a college degree. Henry and Louisa’s decision to send Maynard to Girton also indicates that, within the larger social debates surrounding women’s education, the Maynards challenged conventional understandings of women’s roles within Victorian society. Disregarding this evidence, however, many of the scholars who have examined Maynard’s writings have focused their research, instead, on Maynard’s recollections of repression and discomfort at home. Indeed, the content of Maynard’s autobiography, specifically, helps to create and maintain the dichotomy between restrictive family life and the individual achievements of Britain’s early feminists and female educators. Scholars have relied upon Maynard’s emphasis to support the impression that the family home was a confining environment for unmarried women in the Victorian period. Maynard’s eventual attendance at Girton College, and establishment of her career in education, are treated as matters of chance rather than the result of her previous education or socialization.

The many historians who have examined Constance Maynard’s writings have accepted Maynard’s conclusion that her enrolment at Girton College and her career achievements were the actions of a determined woman asserting a new role for herself in the Victorian “public sphere.” However, their conclusions are challenged by evidence that the Maynard family involved themselves in the debate over women’s education and the role of women in Victorian society with every decision they made with regard to the education and upbringing of their four daughters. While in the Maynard home, Constance Maynard may have felt like a “Greek” brought up in the “school of the strongest kind of ‘Hebrew,’” she does not consider that her parents were not required by
word of law, or contemporary social mores, to provide for her intellectual development. Indeed, Henry and Louisa Maynard made unusual, even subversive decisions about the education of their four daughters. Because of the prevalence of the debates over the education of women, every decision the Maynards made about the education of their daughters challenged contemporary articulations of feminine roles and gender relations within society. Close examination of Maynard’s writings reveal that, not only Constance Maynard, but the entire Maynard family struggled to reconcile prescriptive ideas about Victorian social and family structure with the changing realities of nineteenth century life in Britain and to assert new roles for women within Victorian society.

Conclusion

Writing the Victorian family into the history of Victorian society is an endeavour complicated by the prevalence of contemporary social commentary which characterized the middle-class family as an inherently conservative institution resistant to social change and, also, by the scholarship on modern British society which has, in large part, maintained and supported a belief in the Victorian family’s conservatism. Constance Maynard’s diaries and autobiography help to illuminate the childhood and adolescent experience of a girl growing up in an upper middle-class family in late-nineteenth century Britain and enable the historian to glimpse the dynamics and complexities of Victorian family life. Maynard is, however, complicit in perpetuating a conservative portrayal of the Victorian family. Like many of the scholars of women’s education, Maynard opposes Victorian family life to the ideals and aspirations of Britain’s first generation of college
educated women. The influence of gender theory on histories of Victorian Britain, however, has required the historian of modern British society to write the stories of Victorian families with an understanding of how gender ideologies were employed in Victorian society and to what extent they affected experiences in the family home and the decisions made by those families. Moving beyond the restrictions of family life depicted most clearly in Maynard's autobiography, a comprehensive look at all of Maynard's writings provides scholars with the opportunity to consider how the decisions made by the Victorian family were influenced by knowledge of contemporary articulations of “appropriate” gender roles and relations and to what degree the family participated in establishing new roles for women in Victorian society.

Affirmations of the Victorian family’s conservatism by the Taunton Commissioners, Emily Davies, Dorothea Beale and Constance Maynard, reinforced the separation of social and familial, and of public and private, male and female spheres prevalent in prescribed articulations of Victorian social structure and gender roles. Emphasizing gender divisions had value for individuals who sought to maintain, as well as those who wished to challenge, the structure of British Victorian society. Depicting the Victorian family as staunchly conservative suited the needs of those who favoured the continuation of the public/private divide and sought to maintain the division of space and responsibility between men and women. At the same time, those groups and individuals who wished to change Victorian social structure rallied against the Victorian family which, they believed, supported the maintenance of the social status quo. Victorian feminists sought to alter the ideological assumptions around which Victorian society was organized, but because of their desire for change Carol Dyhouse has argued that many
late-nineteenth century feminists had uncomfortable relationships with their families. This discomfort is certainly apparent in Maynard’s recollections of her childhood and life at home. It is better attributed, however, to the conflict single women had with the ideals and rhetoric implicated in the Victorian home, and to their general desire to challenge the values held by their society, than to any actions taken or decisions made by parents like Henry and Louisa Maynard.

A conservative impression of the Victorian family served a political purpose in late-nineteenth century Britain. The middle-class Victorian family represented the maintenance of the social status quo to single women who rejected social standards which depicted women as only wives and mothers. Through their unconventional career decisions, women like Constance Maynard rebelled against both their families and the conservative social structure the Victorian family supposedly embodied. Maynard’s academic and career achievements were exceptional for a woman born in the middle of the nineteenth century. She pursued a college education and, later, established Westfield College at the University of London. While Maynard’s writings and recollections document and depict these accomplishments, they deny the role her home life played in shaping her attitudes and desires and in encouraging her academic aptitude.

The ambivalence gleaned in an examination of the Maynard family relations and in the educational decisions taking place in the Maynard home is not, however, the result of a family life irreconcilable with the values and aspirations of Victorian feminism. Instead, Maynard’s conflict with her family life reflects the contradictions within ideal gender constructions, and tensions between what the family appeared to be on the surface, and its more complex relationship to larger social concerns. The debates over women’s
education entailed questions about the nature of women’s rights, their responsibilities within Victorian society, and their physical and mental abilities. Despite the potentially subversive nature of women’s schooling, the Maynards persisted in educating their four daughters at home and in boarding schools. Maynard’s recollections of childhood and adolescence indicate that the dynamics in the Maynard household challenged prescriptive notions of “appropriate” Victorian gender roles and relations. Louisa Maynard’s authority in the schoolroom, Henry Maynard’s peripheral importance in the lives of his children, the influence of Evangelical religious beliefs, and the insistence on equality of education and opportunity between the Maynard boys and girls, in the Maynard home each challenged conventional ideals about separate spheres and appropriate male and female roles.

Opposing family values to the experience of exceptional women like Maynard also serves a political purpose for historians of women in the Victorian period. Negating the role of the Maynard family in Constance Maynard’s adult achievements, removing their decisions on her behalf from her history, makes her accomplishments appear more hard fought, more unusual, and, therefore, more significant. Women’s historians since the 1970s have sought to assert the agency of women in history and to promote their contributions to it. In order to draw attention to women’s omission from history, the significance of successes like Maynard’s must be emphasized. Challenging the conservative impression of the Victorian family, however, does not refute the agency of women like Maynard. The argument put forth in this paper makes the decisions and life experiences of such women more understandable but no less exceptional. Maynard and her contemporaries in the field of women’s education made unusual and important
decisions regarding their own lives and destinies. Constance Maynard ultimately made the decision to attend Girton and to found Westfield College on her own. Her decisions did not take place within a social or cultural vacuum, but neither did they occur without reference to her family life. The childhood and adolescent experience of growing up in the Maynard home enacted as much influence on Maynard as did the social, political and cultural context in which she lived. Understanding the role a family like the Maynards played in shaping the life and decisions of a woman like Constance Maynard changes the manner in which the Victorian family is written into history, and enables the historian to write a better history of the Victorians.
4 Ibid., 546-60.
5 Maynard, Autobiography, Maynard Collection, 4.
9 10 Denise Riley, Am I That Name?: Feminism and the Category of Woman in History, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 49. Linda Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History” Journal of American History 75, (June 1988): 21. While Kerber treats separate spheres as historically contingent, rhetorical constructions, Riley, argues that male and female, public and private, do not exist outside the meanings ascribed them. She argues that the public and private dichotomy is best understood as a “field of invention and reform,” and a site of competing and complicit ideologies
13 See Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd, eds., Domestic Space: Reading the Nineteenth Century Interior (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Alan Kidd and David Nicholls, eds. Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism: Middle-Class Identity in Britain, 1800-1940 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Nicola Diane Thompson, ed., Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Lynn M. Voskuil “Feeling Public: Sensation Theatre, Commodity Culture, and the Victorian Public Sphere” Victorian Studies (Winter 2002) for examples of recent work on the Victorian public and private spheres. See Anderson, 45.
14 Anderson, 62.
19 Maria Tamboukou, “Of Other Spaces: Women’s Colleges at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century in the UK” Gender, Place and Culture 7, 3 2000: 248. Otherwise, the most recent works to examine Maynard’s life in any detail, Mary Hilton and Pam Hirsch’s Practical Visionaries: Women, Education and Social Progress, 1790-1930, published in 2000, and Pamela J. Walker’s Pulling the Devil’s Kingdom Down: The Salvation Army in Victorian Britain, published in 2001, deal, respectively, with Maynard’s university education and her teaching life. Neither volume is concerned with Maynard’s family life in any way.
24 Maynard diaries, Maynard Collection, passim.
See Firth, 20.


Hammerton, 73-6.


King, “Reminiscences,” Maynard Collection, 35.

King, 35.


King, “Reminiscences,” Maynard Collection, 29.


“Autobiography,” 145


“Autobiography,” passim. As they grew older the Maynard children would expand their social circle. There is clear evidence, however, that until they went away to school the Maynard children did not engage in social functions with the Hawkhurst neighbours.


See Stephen Mintz

Mintz., 51. Mintz draws these conclusions about Victorian parental archetypes from his case study of five Victorian families, including those of Robert Louis Stevenson, George Eliot and Harriet Beacher Stowe.

John Tosh, A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England (New Haven, Connectic.: Yale University Press, 1999), 91.


Tosh, 46-50.


King, “Reminiscences,” Maynard Collection, 36.

King, 35.

King, passim. On the subject of precise subject matter taught to the Maynard children, King is more explicit than Maynard, whose preoccupation was with books and poems read, and who makes only passing reference to languages learnt.

Maynard, “Autobiography,” Maynard Collection, 15. The only novels referred to in Maynard’s autobiography are those by Sir Walter Scott.


King, 25.

Dyhouse “Mothers and Daughters,” 30.

Maynard, “Autobiography,” Maynard Collection, 20. While George and Harry were both away at school, as were Dora and Gabrielle, it is unclear in both Mary King’s accounts and Maynard’s autobiography where Josephine was during this period. One imagines were she at home she would have had influence on Constance’s education. It is possible that she spent time in Scotland and the English countryside with family.


Peterson, 677.

Katharina Rowold, ed., Gender and Science: Late Nineteenth Century Debates on the Female Mind and Body (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996), xv.


Firth, 51.

Maynard, “Autobiography,” Maynard Collection, 45-7

Schools Inquiry Commission, Report, 1.

Report, 14.

Report, 568.

Report, 2.

Report, 548.

Report, 559-62.

Report, 570.

Stephens, 48-9.

Stephens, 559.

Dorothea Beale, “Address to the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science” (1865), cited in Spender, 127.

Schools Inquiry Commission, Report, 44


Schools Inquiry Commission, Report, 560.

Beale, 127.


Gorham, The Victorian Girl, 27.


“Autobiography,” 82.


Hilton, Practical Visionaries, 13-6. See also Marjorie Reeves, Pursuing the Muses: Female Education and Nonconformist Culture, 1700-1900 (London: Leicester University Press, 1997).


Vicinus, 12.

Maynard diary, passim, Maynard Collection.


Gorham “The Ideology of Femininity,” 43.

King, “Reminiscences,” Maynard Collection, 38.


Green-book, 14 April 1872.

Green-book, 14 April 1872.

See Vicinus.

Emily Davies, cited in Spender, 115.
Maynard diary, 18 May 1872, Maynard Collection.
Maynard diary, 29 June 1872, Maynard Collection.
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