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**Article:**

O’ Hagan, L. (2018) “Clean nails are the mark of a well brought-up girl”*: exploring gender in a post-Edwardian girls’ school exercise book. Women's Studies, 47 (8). pp. 765-790. ISSN 0049-7878*

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2018.1524764>

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This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Women's Studies* on 09 Nov 2018, available online:  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/00497878.2018.1524764>.

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**“Clean Nails are the Mark of a Well Brought-Up Girl”: Exploring Gender in a Post-Edwardian Girls’ School Exercise Book**

**Lauren O’ Hagan**

This study brings together two neglected fields of research – the writing of ordinary people and the materiality of schooling – to explore the representation of gender in a British girls’ school exercise book from the early twentieth century. The exercise book belonged to my great-grandmother, Violet Haynes, who attended Hannah More Girls’ School in St Philips, Bristol from 1907 to 1919. The pupils of Hannah More Girls’ School were predominantly working-class and came from the surrounding districts of Easton, Eastville, and St Jude’s, impoverished areas characterised by their insalubrious and crime-infested slums (Smith 7).

The school exercise book is an example of what Jennifer Sinor (5) calls “ordinary writing” – that is, “writing that is typically unseen or ignored and is primarily defined by its status as discardable”. Julia Gillen and Nigel Hall (170) argue that ordinary writing from England’s past represents “an elusive quarry” in which only the writing of the elite or distinctive educated individuals has survived in archives, libraries, and personal collections. Thus, using a working-class exercise book to study ordinary writing is powerful, as it represents one of the few remaining tangible resources for exploring the life of working-class girls in post-Edwardian Britain. Furthermore, emphasising a working-class girl’s experience offers a new perspective on schooling in the early twentieth century, given that most historical accounts tend to concentrate predominantly on the experiences of men (Johnson; Simon; Silver), use language that hides or marginalises the presence of girls (Hunt) or focus overwhelmingly on middle-class girls (Burstyn; Hobsbawm; Hunt). This research aims to redress the stereotype that girls were passive recipients of information, and demonstrate that, in fact, the board school encouraged working-class girls to play an active role in their educative experience and to negotiate their female identity in light of the New Woman movement.

Exploring gender within an early twentieth-century context remains relevant today, given the unequal educational experiences that girls still suffer, as well as the gender stereotypes that persist in school textbooks and resources (Riley). By using the activities and feedback in Violet’s exercise book to map particular attitudes to and constructions of gender, we can correct any potentially harmful behaviours that still remain in our society and strive to create a modern classroom environment with equality of opportunity for girls. Moreover, by giving a voice to the forgotten working-class girls of post-Edwardian Britain, we ensure that the important contribution

that they made to education in the early twentieth century is not represented as peripheral to the mainstream educational concerns of the period.

The study blends both ethnographic and ethnohistorical research to emphasise the users and producers of the exercise book and the ways in which they engaged with the broader social practices and discourses of which their actions were part. Although Violet died in 1986, I have interviewed relatives (including her son-in-law and granddaughter) to get an idea of her identity, beliefs, and morals, and whether these can be traced back to specific mentalities conveyed in her exercise book. The ethnohistorical aspect is provided by the use of Hannah More's log books and minute books to explore recorded material on Violet, as well as census records and Violet's private poetry collections. The information in the exercise book is also critically examined throughout using a range of literature on schooling in the nineteenth and early twentieth century in Britain. Through its topics, content, and activities, Violet's book can provide an elucidating account of secondary schooling for girls in the early twentieth century in England.

### **The Materiality of Schooling**

While textbooks are generally remembered by pupils, exercise books tend to become forgotten by their users and pushed deep into personal or collective memory as functional objects necessary to complete a task. Consequently, exercise books have been largely neglected by scholars and relegated to the position of mere curios in museums and archives. It is only within the last ten years that academic interest in the exercise book has arisen as a result of a growing enthusiasm for cultural history and the materiality of schooling. While most studies on schooling have tended to prioritise professionalism or the science of education as their main themes, the materiality of schooling focuses on the tools that allow these grand narratives to function. In particular, it explores how objects such as pencils, blackboards, and exercise books are used and given meaning, and how they are linked into heterogenous active networks with people and routines (Lawn and Grosvenor).

In 2007, Maria Pozo-Andrés and Andrea Ramos-Zamora used a dataset of seventy school exercise books from a village in Spain written between 1936 and 1939 and compared the books from Republican areas with those in Francoist areas. Their study demonstrated how exercise books can offer historians a new and unexplored source to understand the daily life of a particular community. One year later, Frederik Herman *et al.* investigated the various functions of a collection of exercise books written in Belgium between 1950 and 1970 by interviewing their owners and asking questions about their context of use.

The first major attempt to compile a volume on the benefits of using school exercise books to understand education in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was carried out by Juri Meda, Davide Montino, and Roberto Sani in 2010. Using a selection of papers written in English, French, Italian, and Spanish, the book outlines new methodological approaches for thinking about exercise book analysis, describes major public collections on school exercise books, and discusses their multifunctionality as tools of mass communication and mass education and as sources of the history of language and teaching.

While these studies indicate the increasing acknowledgement of the exercise book as a unique and concrete ethnohistorical source for exploring school culture and sociocultural beliefs in a given historical context, thus far, very few studies have taken place within a British context or used the book's activities and feedback to explore particular representations of gender. This study will highlight how exercise books act as "mirrors of actual practice" (Herman *et al.* 352) that not only inform us of life in the classroom, but also help establish a dialectic between the observable present and the tangible remains of the past. This enables the traces left behind by former inhabitants to be assessed critically in relation to modern-day sociocultural beliefs and schooling practices (Lawn and Grosvenor).

### **The Evolution of the School Exercise Book**

Although the school exercise book is generally considered to be a late nineteenth-century phenomenon, Jean Hébrard (175) claims that a lack of surviving evidence means that a definite history cannot be established.

Historically, the teaching of writing and composing has not always involved the exercise book. Examples of school work have been found on Egyptian papyrus, Mesopotamian clay tablets, and Greek pottery fragments, while the wax tablets introduced by the Romans continued to be used in schools throughout Europe well into the Middle Ages (Goody; Riché). These tablets were widely replaced by slate in the eighteenth century as a result of developments in sea and land transport, which permitted the gradual expansion of slate quarrying in Wales (Davies).

The cyphering book is generally considered to be the earliest example of an exercise book in Great Britain. Defined as a "manuscript notebook that contained mathematical definitions, rules, examples, problems, and exercises" (Rauner Library), the cyphering book was introduced into British schooling in the mid-eighteenth century, and constituted many schoolchildren's first written encounter with paper (Ellerton and Clements 2). At this time, the use of these exercise books was determined predominantly by cost over any other factor. Therefore, they were only introduced into schools with the economic means to afford them. This meant that their primary

users were male pupils of boarding and grammar schools and middle-class girls who were taught at home by governesses or attended fee-paying private schools (Bowles Smith 174). Working-class children, on the other hand, who were sent to dame schools and charity schools, continued to use slate and chalk. This is because many educators believed that these children were not trusted to use exercise books correctly (Hébrard 174).

Hannah More Girls' School is an example of a working-class charity school, which was built in 1839 following a general bequest left by the philanthropist Hannah More (Townsend). According to school reports from the time, toilets and washing facilities were non-existent, the classrooms were overcrowded and unheated, and no seating was provided (Townsend). Given these limited resources, it is highly likely that Hannah More was not able to afford exercise books for their pupils.

While the education of working-class girls and boys was aimed at providing them with a basic foundation in the three Rs – reading, writing and arithmetic (Silver 159) –, in the mid-nineteenth century, there was little to distinguish the education that middle-class girls and boys received. In 1867, the Schools Inquiry Commission carried out an investigation on school curricula and determined that special courses had to be provided for “the weak, inherent in women” (Burstall 44) that were suited to their so-called needs and power. As a result, girls began to receive a distinctive curriculum to boys that focused heavily on domestic science, cooking, laundry, and needlework. These changes also brought about a shift in the use of exercise books in schools.

For middle-class girls, the copybook was introduced into the classroom. As its name implies, the copybook was made up of blank spaces that were used to copy examples of handwriting and learn penmanship (Victorian School). Penmanship was deemed a vital skill for middle-class girls who would be expected to run a household and correspond appropriately with friends and acquaintances. In some working-class schools, older girls were also entrusted with the copybook, whereas their younger counterparts continued to use slate or were provided with loose leaf sheets of paper to practice letters (Hébrard 174). In Hannah More Girls' School, slate and chalk remained the favoured choice of writing implement at this time. While middle-class girls now had cyphering books and copybooks, middle-class boys were the first to be provided with blank, lined exercise books for all subjects from English and Geography to History and Latin (Hébrard 174). The provision of these books marked the beginning of a change in traditional methods of teaching, as they encouraged creative writing activities as opposed to copying and repeating.

In 1870, the British parliament passed an Education Act which provided the framework for a national system of elementary education for boys and girls. Under this act, a system of 2,500 school boards were created with the aim of building and managing schools in working-class areas (Hattersley 246). This was instrumental in

making the use of exercise books widespread across all schools in Great Britain. The increased availability of money for resources, coupled with the dramatic decrease in cost of paper due to the discovery of mechanical and chemical wood pulp, meant that schools were able to purchase commercially-printed, lined exercise books for all pupils for the first time (Ellerton and Clements 127). This led to the gradual eradication of slate as a writing resource in working-class schools, putting these children on a level playing field with their upper-class peers when learning to write.

Hannah More was one of the schools to benefit directly from this act. The Bristol School Board equipped the school with cloakrooms and washbasins, open fireplaces, hot water pipes, and sufficient ventilation (Hannah More Infants School Log Book, 1870-1893), and split it into three separate parts for infants, boys, and girls. McDermid (42) claims that gender segregation was a notable feature of working-class education, as it was deemed morally dangerous for boys and girls to mix. After the introduction of three further Acts in 1876, 1880, and 1893, which made elementary schooling compulsory and increased the minimum school leaving age to thirteen, the Bristol School Board ensured that all board schools in the city, including Hannah More, were provided with copybooks and exercise books, as well as individual desks and chairs (Bristol School Board Triennial Reports, 1889-1903). According to government inspectors, the Bristol School Board carried out its duties with “more ability, fairness and success” (Transactions of the National Association of the Promotion of Social Science) than any other comparable authority. The efforts of the Bristol School Board were responsible for a vast improvement in the education of working-class children in Bristol, particularly young girls who now had a place they could attend daily to receive schooling. By the turn of the century, Britain had almost a one hundred percent literacy rate (Vincent 4). The 1870 Education Act and the work of school boards was directly responsible for this achievement.

In 1902, another Education Act was established, which disbanded the school boards and created Local Education Authorities (LEA). These LEAs were responsible for the rapid growth of secondary schools, and by 1914, over 1,000 secondary schools were open across Great Britain, 349 of which were for girls only (Searle 210). Standish Meacham (192) describes the act as providing a “democratic highway” to secondary education for working-class children. This was certainly the case with Hannah More Girls’ School, which became rebranded as a municipal secondary school for girls (defined at this time as “schools for children between ten and thirteen years old” (Gillard)) and thus, received additional funding for teachers and classroom resources, including exercise books.

Violet Haynes was born in 1904, and was enrolled in Hannah More Infants' School in 1907 when she was three years old. In 1914, when Violet was ten, she moved to Hannah More Girls' School. Although Violet was set to leave school in 1917 at the age of thirteen, an important education act passed in parliament under the Liberal MP, Herbert Fisher, which made secondary education compulsory up to age fourteen, and also included provision for part-time education for all fourteen- to eighteen-year-olds. Consequently, Violet remained at Hannah More one more year, leaving in 1919.

Violet attended up to twenty-six hours of classes a week, each lesson lasting forty-five minutes. Classes consisted of roughly thirty pupils and were delivered principally on a weekday morning from 9-1, leaving the afternoons free for such tasks as sewing and housework. Humanities formed a major part of Violet's education at Hannah More. At this time, humanities were believed to provide girls with the mental and emotional training for their future life as women (Burstall 109). This focus is reflected in Violet's exercise books, which are primarily used to record written activities on English, History, Geography, and Divinity.

The exercise book that is the subject of study in this paper spans a period from 1917 to 1919 when Violet was in Standard VII. These years are important because they not only mark the change in legislation regarding the age of compulsory education, but also represent a transition period between the final years and aftermath of World War One when traditional attitudes on gender, class, and national identity were beginning to change. The back of Violet's exercise book features an advertisement for the new part-time education offered at the Bristol Evening Institutes for over fourteens. This advertisement demonstrates the growing commitment of the government to further education. Most relevant to this study, however, is the proof that this advertisement provides in terms of how well-embedded exercise books were in school culture by this time. Advertisers will only choose to print adverts in places where they are likely to be seen by many people; accordingly, the use of the school exercise book as a mobile canvas for advertisements shows its popularity as an educative tool, as well as its accepted position in the classroom, a position that has remained unchallenged since.

### **The Social Life of the Exercise Book**

David Barton and Uta Papen (3) note that writing is an everyday communicative practice which pervades our lives at both an individual and societal level. Writing is created by people and passed on culturally, it has symbolic value and material aspects, it is crucial to interaction between people, and it is central to knowledge creation. Examining written texts is essential for understanding how societies operate and are organised, how institutions communicate with the public, how work is being done, how individuals and social groups organise their lives and

make sense of their experiences, and how cultures in all their variations are produced and reproduced. By examining writing as both a cultural and a social practice, its centrality to how societies operate and to the ways individuals relate to each other and to institutions can be demonstrated.

Brenda Danet (9), a sociologist who specialises in communication, argues that all written texts have their own aura, which tell a history of the hands that have touched them (e.g., crumpled pages, faded bindings, inscriptions). In their work on domestic symbols and the self, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton (10) see books as emblems of identity “whose presence decorates a room, symbolises our identity and life experience, embodies important memories and intellectual, spiritual and recreational concerns”. School exercise books, in particular, embody what Raymond Williams (50) has called a “selection tradition” in that they reflect someone’s vision of legitimate knowledge and culture.

For many children, their first serious engagement with writing takes place in a school environment. When exploring writing, the school exercise book is an interesting source of inscription, as, although each book belonged to one person (ownership was marked explicitly on the front cover) and written activities were carried out individually, these spaces were semi-private and impersonal in nature. Exercise books were frequently invaded through regular inspections by teachers, parents, and other classmates, which forced the pupils to behave as required. While the exercise book was used to impart experiences, observations, and reflections, this was bound by the task set by the teacher, as well as an awareness that it would be read by others. As a consequence, the notion of addressing became crucial in exercise book writing, as the pupil’s construction of themselves in connection to the world emerged as a product of social consciousness rather than as a solipsistic act. Fictionalising the addressee also raised issues, as the pupil had to ask whether to write for her teacher (the implied reader), for herself, for a future self, or an idealised self. The new media researcher Jose van Dijck recognises that acts of writing do not happen in a social vacuum; instead, they occupy their own niche alongside other acts of communication. Although the tasks in the exercise book were enforced by the teacher, the act of writing was both a means of self-protection and self-expression. Not only did it reflect life, but it also became a mechanism of constructing it.

Throughout their educational life at Hannah More Girls’ School, pupils did not have any real private sphere, given that even in the playground or corridors they were visible and subject to the scrutiny of others. The organisation of space, whether in the school building or in the school exercise book, was used to institutionalise supervision. All girls at Hannah More were assigned the same exercise book and were expected to write in black ink fountain pens. Herman *et al.* (370) believe that keeping exercise books uniform in style fit within a web of

categories governed by moral expectations, political strategies, and tactics of schools. The exercise book was a tightly regulated space that only allowed limited personal character or marks of singularity. Most acts of writing were carried out within a criteria of strict rules on handwriting, layout, and grammar that had to be obeyed, and any deviation from these rules risked punishment.

Herman *et al.* (367) claim that even when pupils made drawings, they did not reflect a creative or free spirit. Rather, they were uniform in design, which was connected to both the permanent threat of checking and punishment and the incorporation of school patterns of values and standards. While some studies have found examples of exercise books that were used as spaces of opposition (Perrenoud), these acts were infrequent and no examples are present in Violet's exercise book. Although there are some examples of playful splurges, such as doodles and scribbles made to counteract boredom, they cannot be classed as intentional deviations from the rules. Instead, as Herman *et al.* (371) suggest, they represent the child briefly dropping out of their subordinate role as pupil.

The organisation of space within the exercise book also played an important role in the way in which values were indicated and disseminated. For example, the number of hours set aside for a particular subject, the place of the subject on the timetable, and the types of task set all served to influence its importance. In this way, the exercise book acted as a "symbolic product" (Axtell 2) that contained the values and rules of the school, while simultaneously acting as a vehicle through which they were transmitted to pupils. Despite the fact that the writing in the exercise book was produced within the enclosed space of the classroom, the possibility that it could be taken home to complete homework tasks indicates its ability to seep into, and thus influence, the outside world.

### **Gender in the Classroom**

According to Jane McDermid (19), the board school curriculum was heavily influenced by female domesticity and sought to promote the attainment of appropriate feminine accomplishments. For working-class girls, such accomplishments were getting married and having children, or a life of service as a servant (Jacobs 124). While Meg Gomersall (134) believes that the intention was to confer advantage by educating girls towards a proper appreciation of where their true interests lay (i.e., the home), Kimberley Reynolds (60) argues that instilling habits of obedience was, in fact, an effective means of exercising social control and maintaining the status quo. Louis Althusser (150) supports this view, maintaining that under the guise of liberation, board schools promoted subjugation and provided girls with an ideology that suited the role they were expected to fulfil in society. This was particularly important in post-Edwardian Britain, as the New Woman movement that had recently emerged,

characterised by emancipation, independence, and liberation, had started to challenge conventional gender roles and upset traditional expectations of womanhood (Lavender).

Despite these long-held views on the objectives of the board school, the first-hand evidence provided by Violet Haynes' exercise book demonstrates that the representation of female gender in early twentieth-century board schools is, in fact, far more complex. Through its activities and exercises, Violet's book shows a blend of traditional and modern perspectives on women, revealing that this post-Edwardian era represented an essential transitional period in terms of women's roles, responsibilities, and expectations. Violet's essays often tread a line between the acceptance of how a 'good girl' should behave and an awareness of the greater possibilities that could exist for women. Mona Siegel (13) claims that children "are not empty vessels into which knowledge is poured". Violet epitomises this statement as, despite her working-class background, she is able to use the exercise book as a discursive space in which to experiment with her identity and play with conventional codes of gender display. Although similar discoveries have been made regarding girls' use of social media websites (Willem *et al.*), the findings of this study indicate that this practice is not something new and was, in fact, being carried out more than one hundred years ago by working-class board school girls.

While traditional written tasks for girls involved dictation or copying directly from the board, most activities in Violet's exercise book involve essay questions to which she must write her own response. This shows a changing perspective in female education. When Hannah More first became a board school in 1870, pupils were not encouraged to share their own opinions. Indeed, there are many examples in the school logbook of girls being deemed "impertinent" or "ill-mannered" for doing so, as it was considered a lack of respect for the teacher's authority. However, by the early twentieth century, Hannah More showed a growing acceptance of essay writing, as it was believed to be one of the only ways in which a teacher could "get at the pupil's mind" when teaching a large class (Burstall 128). Essay writing provided Violet with an opportunity to invent and visualise ideas or situations, consequently promoting originality of thought and creativity of expression. The private space of the exercise book enabled her to challenge traditional expectations of what it meant to be a working-class girl and express opinions that she may not have been able to assert in her home life.

This is clearly exemplified in an essay on strikes and trade unions written on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1919 in which Violet argues that "Capital has had its day; it is now Labour's turn" and striking "is only paying back Capital for their cruelty about eighty years ago." At this time, politics was still considered to be a male sphere from which women were legitimately excluded as political subjects (Waylen 7). As a result, Violet's bold expressions, which show an acute awareness of social views, are rather astonishing. Living in a working-class, impoverished area of

Bristol, Violet's opinions are likely to have been influenced by those around her in the local community. At the time of composition, Violet's electoral ward, Bristol East, was run by the Coalition Liberal, George Bryant Britton. Just four years later in 1923, the seat was won by a Labour MP, Harold Spencer Morris, and has remained Labour ever since, as Violet predicted.

Violet also praises trade unions for helping workers with their grievances, and claims that "the millionaires think they know all about poor men's ways and means of living. They don't! They have not the remotest idea of the matter." The heartfelt passion that comes across in Violet's statement may stem from her own first-hand experience of the importance of trade unions in protecting workers' rights: her father was an iron founder and her two elder brothers were compositors – both jobs that came with considerable risks and long working hours.

While the Bristol LEA outlined a general curriculum for schools, each teacher was responsible for the content of lessons. Therefore, when considering the choice of essay topics, we must not underestimate the teacher's influence. Violet's teacher, Miss Petherton, was a member of the emerging lower-middle class, a group that were highly active in philanthropic and political activities (Cowman 50). Therefore, it is possible that topics, such as that of strikes and trade unions, were chosen deliberately to help empower the working-class girls of Hannah More by teaching them about the protection of their rights. While women's trade union membership increased by about 160% during the war, women remained largely excluded from trade unions until the late twentieth century (Davis). Through the exercise book, girls were able to temporarily suspend reality and think about roles (e.g., trade union membership) that were currently unattainable for them in real life.

Like politics, science was also considered to be a male subject, as it was "inappropriate for the feminine mind" (Dyhouse 162). However, in the early twentieth century, vigorous debate broke out regarding whether it was necessary to teach science in girls' schools. As a result, the Board of Education published *Regulations for Secondary Schools*, suggesting that girls may substitute domestic subjects either partially or wholly for science. This represented a step forward in terms of the provision of education for girls, and is reflected in Miss Petherton's choice of essay topics, which often centre around the speed at which changes were taking place in the world of science and technology. Violet is asked to write about an imaginary ride in a motor car ("we went along with great rapidity"), an imaginary flight on an aeroplane ("what a queer feeling! An awful sensation!"), and a peep into the depths of the ocean ("you may perchance see a stray mermaid"). Although most working-class females would not

have had experienced these activities at this time,<sup>1</sup> the fact that Hannah More Girls' School allowed them to imagine participating is quite forward-thinking.

Kate Flint (22) notes that working-class girls were also advised not to read newspapers, as they were thought to corrupt their innocent mind, hence diminishing their value as women. In this way, like politics and science, current affairs were for men only. Given this belief, it is interesting to note that Miss Petherton often asks her pupils to report on recent scientific and technological advances, which implies an expectation that girls should have some knowledge of topical news. On 17<sup>th</sup> September 1918, for example, Violet writes an essay about Amundsen's proposed visit to the North Pole ("if he does succeed he will be a very great man"), while the day after the first transatlantic flight from Newfoundland to Britain by Alcock and Brown, Violet is asked to draw a map indicating their journey. Likewise, in a writing exercise on an imaginary new invention, Violet outlines the building of the Channel Tunnel, which she argues would "employ thousands of discharged soldiers and sailors." Although the Channel Tunnel was not opened until 1994, at the time of Violet's composition (11/3/19), the possibility of a Channel Tunnel occupied the headlines of most newspapers. The fact that Violet is able to report these events accurately illustrates that she was an intelligent and well-informed girl who did limit herself to traditional expectations of what it meant to be female. Instead, she saw the exercise book as an opportunity to experiment with her identity and push the boundaries of normative gender representations.

Similarly, when asked to write a hypothetical essay about her ideal home, Violet does not adhere to traditional expectations of women as homemakers and mothers (Dyhouse 91). Instead, she describes her dream of living by the seaside in a house with two servants and a cook and having a small pony. This idealised image, which shows Violet's aspirations to become part of the emerging lower-middle class of post-Edwardian society, is in strong contrast to her actual home life where she lived in a small terraced house in the urban centre of Bristol with her parents and five siblings. As the youngest sibling in a house with three older brothers, Violet was expected to undertake traditional feminine roles at home, helping her mother and sisters with domestic duties such as cooking and cleaning. This disparity between Violet's imagined and real life highlight the difficulties that many girls experienced at this time as they tried to find their place in an ever-changing world. Here, the exercise book acts as a 'safe space' in which Violet can impart these secret views free from the prying eyes of siblings or peers.

Nonetheless, some responses in Violet's exercise book betray an awareness that the exercise book was not a completely private space and would be accessed by her teacher. For example, when asked to write about her

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<sup>1</sup> It would not be until the 1960s that Violet first travelled by car (although she never learnt to drive), while she never did travel by boat or aeroplane (despite a lifelong ambition to visit Switzerland).

ideal school, Violet states that “all the girls would be sport and enjoy fun.” In another pen, she then later adds “though not mischievous fun, which would cause trouble.” This indicates an attempt to rectify an earlier statement that could be potentially misinterpreted and criticised by her teacher as an inappropriate way for girls to act. It demonstrates Violet’s awareness of the boundaries of femininity: while girls had increasing freedom to achieve or experience things, the expectations regarding their behaviour still remained the same.

These behavioural expectations run throughout all of Violet’s activities, thereby highlighting that, despite Hannah More’s openness to changes in the roles of women, the school still believed that it was their role to lay the foundations of moral education in girls through the inculcation of school virtues (McDermid 22). For Burstall (68), a good teacher is “at the work of moral training all her time, explicitly or implicitly,” and should impart lessons that transmit messages of the importance of thoroughness, accuracy, steadfastness, and truth in order to exercise influence over “the impressionable mind and character” of girls (56). Within the board school, concerns with morality and respectability seem to have been linked more to the working-class origins of its pupils rather than gender.

The concept of ‘respectability’ recurs frequently throughout etiquette guides of the time (Entwistle 331), and was a major anxiety of all classes of post-Edwardian society. Even in the poorest of families, such as Violet’s, great care was taken to manifest respectability through a clean rent book and whitened doorstep (Lewis 11). The importance of respectability is apparent throughout many of the activities in Violet’s exercise book. She is regularly asked to reflect on her faults (“I often procrastinate, I have a quick temper, and I can be conceitful, jealous and tell lies”), the ways in which she can improve her character (“I will try to help and do my duty to everybody”), and how to overcome aversions (“Must you judge cows by their looks. No, you must judge by their manner”). These ideas reflect literature of the time, which reminded girls that “manners and grace were crucial”, and “tact and taste were more important than brains (Hall 314). This was particularly important for working-class girls, as most were expected to go into domestic service, which required honesty, loyalty, and respect (Cassell’s Household Guide). McDermid (46) claims that thrift was another major quality with which board school girls were inculcated. The importance of thrift is clearly reflected in Violet’s exercise book: her response to a composition on debt is “who goeth a borrowing goeth a sorrowing,” while her reaction to the importance of money is “a good name is better than great riches.”

It is clear from Violet’s responses that they are heavily influenced by religious doctrine. Although board schools were secular in nature, many working-class children were expected to receive religious education from Sunday schools. Snell (148) describes the Sunday school as “one strand of a uniquely working-class cultural

constellation". Violet was a regular attendee of St Jude's Sunday school, and it was here that she met Thomas Fry, who she married in 1930. According to Violet's granddaughter (my mother), Violet's religious beliefs and strong morals guided her throughout her life, and as an adult, she regularly wrote poetry, thanking God for what she had. The exercise book indicates that, despite Violet's forward thinking in terms of girls' achievements and aspirations, she was comfortable to frame her moral beliefs within the context of her religion, and did not feel that this threatened her position as a woman or held her back. For Violet, to be a girl was to be morally upright; however, this did not mean that girls were not capable of achieving things.

In addition to religion and respectability, throughout the early twentieth century, there was rising concern in board schools about whether the curriculum was causing strain or 'overpressure' on working-class girls (Dyhouse 136). In response, a large body of literature was published conflating the preservation of health with a "moral duty that was owed to the Empire and the Race" (Dyhouse 136). One of the most influential writers was Sloan Chesser, a lecturer in hygiene with the Women's Imperial Health Association. She declared that illness is "a disgrace" to girls because it "indicates physiological sins past or present"(3). Similarly, in her *Personal Hygiene for Girls*, Mary Humphreys declares neglect of health to be "a particularly selfish and absolutely unpardonable offence" (54), while Sarah Burstall argues that all girls must be able to recognise the signs of infectious illness (95).

This obsession with bodily health and hygiene is a recurring theme throughout Violet's exercise book and the Hannah More logbooks.<sup>2</sup> When writing a composition on 'the importance of caring for the hands and nails' (30/10/17). Violet reflects the manuals of the time through her argument that "clean nails are the mark of a well brought up girl." She also quotes another traditional belief that "biting the nails brings on appendicitis." These preoccupations highlight the supposed link between girls' hygiene and moral values; to be healthy was the result of a moral exercise of moderation and docility, of abiding by the advice of experts, and of transforming one's lifestyle and habits (Dussel 106).

Violet's exercise book also contains compositions that were set as a result of a public health epidemic in a bid to raise awareness on how to contain outbreaks of the illness. Shortly after the beginning of the 1918 Spanish influenza, Violet is asked to reflect on how to avoid the flu. Her arguments include "getting as much fresh air as possible and having as much hot milk as you can afford." In post-Edwardian Britain, a new understanding of biology had ushered an emphasis on fresh air. Dussel notes that schoolgirls became encouraged to play outside,

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<sup>2</sup> Dirty and infected heads and the dangers that this might suppose to other children is frequently reported in the school logbooks.

as it was healthier than sitting in all day (107). While Violet's response may imply that she was heavily influenced by expert opinions on how girls should act, it is more likely that her concerns stem from first-hand experience of growing up in a poor area where illness and death were everyday occurrences.

The importance of girls dressing respectfully was another key preoccupation for educators in the early twentieth century. The perils of untidy dress were frequently emphasised in hygiene manuals of the time, with Burstall claiming that extravagant dress is "almost as injurious to national welfare as is drunkenness among the masses" (97). Hannah More required girls to wear white smocks, forbid jewellery and high heels, and prescribed a certain arrangement of the hair. Dussel claims that school uniform is a relevant feature in the performance of schooling, as it enhances an institutional identity for pupils (Dussel 97). At Hannah More, this standardised dress code represented a disciplining of the girls' bodies by a higher power (i.e., the headmistress), while the choice of white signalled purity, decency, and sexual probity – all key ideals of how a 'good girl' should be (Vavrus; Steele and Brush-Kidwell). This concern for appropriate dress is reflected in several of Violet's essays, including why girls should not wear jewellery at school (15/5/18). She argues that jewellery "does not show refinement, is quite unnecessary and often trashy stuff." These responses indicate a clear repetition of school rules that would have been asserted by Violet's teacher. Hence, we must consider the possibility that Violet was writing with an awareness of her teacher's own perceptions in a bid to please her rather than expressing her own views.

Nonetheless, despite her consciousness of the teacher's presence, other responses by Violet show that she was willing to negotiate some aspects of her personal identity. For example, when asked to describe the most useful fashion inventions in recent years, Violet focuses on prettiness over practicality, despite the concern at this time that girls' clothing should be simple and not concerned with vanity (Burstall 96). Violet argues that "nothing looks nicer than a daintily made camisole top!", while Dorothy bags are "sensible and exquisitely pretty". The teacher's response, "not your best work", insinuates that the expectation was to focus on the utility of garments as opposed to their aesthetic appeal. Violet's writing indicates that to her, looking nice was not incompatible with wearing refined and tasteful clothes – an opinion that was quite outspoken for the early twentieth century.

Alcoholism and smoking were also considered hygienic-moral problems that had to be taught to schoolgirls in order to prevent illness. In a task on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1917, Violet is asked to write an essay on the dangers of intoxicating drinks. Given the association that many made between drunkenness and the working classes (Entwistle 148), this topic may have been chosen deliberately to encourage the Hannah More girls towards abstinence. The text contains many supposed truths, such as "the heart of a drunkard is twice the size it ought to be" and "one eighth of spirits makes your heart beat four thousand times extra." This type of information was

transmitted to working-class children by the Band of Hope, the largest temperance society at the time (Lewis Shiman 51). It is possible that Violet may have simply been repeating ‘facts’ that she had heard at Bristol Band of Hope meetings in her local area.

In addition to lessons on health and hygiene, Violet regularly received instruction on letter-writing. Letter-writing was considered an essential skill for all women to learn, as women were believed to have “more tact, vivacity, and fluency” than men (Westlake). Teaching girls how to write letters properly was even more necessary in 1917, given the number of pupils who had fathers, brothers, uncles, and cousins fighting abroad in World War One. It is estimated that the British Army Postal Service delivered around two billion letters during the war (Mason and Parton). This importance is reflected in Violet’s exercise book in which a range of letter-writing is practised at least once a week.

David Barton and Nigel Hall state that letter-writing has its own unspoken code in which handwriting, form, and structure all play an important role. For this reason, it allows writers little room to express their own views and negotiate their identity. Letters in Violet’s book adhere to typical views on women’s language as containing more hedges, ‘empty’ adjectives and super polite forms (Lakoff), while their themes (e.g., apologising for absence, thanking somebody for a gift, accepting an invitation) reflect the role that girls were expected to play in society at this time: that of dutiful and courteous young ladies. The only attempt that Violet makes to go against the traditional expectations of letter-writing is met with criticism by her teacher. In a letter-writing exercise about applying for a job, Violet writes:

“Dear Madam,

When I read of your advertisement, I thought it exactly the place for me. My age is fourteen. I am passionately fond of children. Expect me at your house on Monday next at 7am. My terms are seven shillings per week board and lodgings extra.

Yours respectfully,

Violet Haynes”

The teacher finds Violet’s response incredibly rude and writes “this is hardly the way to apply for a post,” underlining her comment to stress its severity. While this comment implies that the teacher is curbing Violet’s freedom of expression, one could argue that this was, in fact, an example of ‘tough love’ to ensure that Violet learnt the correct form to write a letter, which would ensure that she found work when leaving school. As letter-writing is embedded in a particular social situation, which gains its meaning from being situated in cultural beliefs,

values and practices (Barton and Hall), abiding by strict rules was essential for Violet, not due to her gender but due to her ability to get by in the world.

In addition to letter-writing, many educators believed that girls should learn poetry, particularly the works of Longfellow, Scott, Milton, and Wordsworth (Burstall 128). Poetry was long-believed to be a woman's subject: a 1907 article in *The Girls' Own Paper* states that poetry "raises tone of mind and purifies moral," while Salmon (234) claimed that poetry imparted grace in girls. This emphasis is apparent in Violet's exercise book, as many imaginative compositions begin with a poem from the aforementioned poets. Poetry was a subject that Violet enjoyed immensely throughout her life: her granddaughter, Tina, recalls that Violet always carried a notebook on her to write down her thoughts. One of Violet's poems from 1975 outlines Tennyson as her favourite poet – a view that had not changed since her essay dated 18/2/19 in which she states Tennyson "had the great power of ingenuity and was better than Shakespeare and Milton."

Violet's enduring view on Tennyson suggest that, when studying poetry, she did not speculate whether it was a feminine subject or not; instead, she simply took pleasure in the poems themselves for what they were. This indicates that girls were not blank slates onto which views on girlhood could be imprinted. Rather, they drew their own meaning from subjects and applied them to their own life situations. Given this finding, it stands to reason that we must redress perceptions of 'male' and 'female' subjects, which contribute to the persistence of subject stereotypes (i.e., girls are more likely to study arts and humanities and boys, science and engineering (Thibout)). By focusing on engaging children in a subject's content and themes as opposed to its association with a particular gender, they are more likely to feel motivated and able to succeed.

Another popular board school exercise involved pupils drawing an image from memory based on a particular verbal stimulus. In Violet's book, these drawings often reflect items that were important to her, such as the tray cloth used on Sundays and the drawing room carpet. However, while these objects are all located within the feminine domestic sphere, it is Violet's awareness of class, not of gender, that influences her choices.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the concept of 'portable property', defined by Plotz (2) as "everyday culture-bearing objects", grew in importance in Great Britain. The ownership of items, such as the aforementioned tray cloth and drawing room carpet, asserted stability and credit-worthiness, and generated a sense of power within families. This was particularly important for the working classes who stored the little wealth they had as things in the house rather than as money in banks (Stallybrass 202). For Violet, writing about these objects projected a positive view of her family despite their humble background, showing her awareness of the exercise book's movement between the private and public domain. Through the activities, we learn that the tray cloth was a parting

present from Violet's cousin to her mother when she got married and is only used on rare occasions, and the drawing room carpet was homemade by Violet and her sisters. These items act as symbolic signifiers of social mobility and demonstrate attempts by Violet to portray her family as respectable.

No discussion of the post-Edwardian girls' school exercise book can be complete without mentioning national identity. Stephen Heathorn argues that the board school served as a workshop of reformulated English nationalism, whereby girls and boys were expected to identify with Englishness over Britishness, as it was "at the core of the best British values" (Heathorn 95). Throughout Violet's exercise book, imperial expansion is presented as an integral part of the English racial mission, while England is portrayed as a "beacon in an unruly world" (Siegel 4). Furthermore, the words 'glory', 'righteousness', and 'courage' prevail, while national symbols, such as the Union Jack and the Magna Carta, are regularly mentioned.<sup>3</sup> Siegel argues that these symbols acted as cultural relics that "conveyed and reaffirmed legitimacy of governing in thousands of unspoken ways" (Siegel 165). In this respect, few differences can be seen between Violet's exercise book and the exercise book of her male counterparts.<sup>4</sup> This implies that in issues of national identity, board schools considered it essential that both boys and girls were taught similar curricula, as they were integral to the collective memory of events and for passing these events onto their children (Siegel 54).

History lessons at Hannah More frequently introduced girls to historical martial figures, such as Alfred the Great and Wellington, as heroic role models of patriotism. Through the curriculum, a cult of national heroes was established, all of whom were notable for their acts of bravery or noble qualities. Amongst her many historical compositions, Violet portrays St George as "our greatest hero" and Nelson as "a dutiful and steadfast man." With the exception of Florence Nightingale, no examples of heroic females were used. This reinforced the message that any girls who moved outside of their close-knit communities were advised to do so for the purposes of village nursing, the founding of hospitals and orphanages, or for missionary ardour (Entwistle 135). Furthermore, it highlighted that girls only reached their full stature through self-sacrifice and renunciation of their personal goals.

Violet's exercise books show an increasing focus on the concept of 'the enemy' from the beginning of World War One onwards. Whereas previously girls were inactive bystanders of conflicts, the Great War enabled them to take an active role for the first time. Violet's books indicate that Hannah More used history lessons to

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<sup>3</sup> The importance of the Empire can also be noted in the school logbooks, which record the annual Empire Day celebrations on May 25th in great detail. They describe how the children were assembled to sing 'The Flag of Britain' and the 'National Anthem', waved the Union Jack, and cheered for "the King, Queen, Empire and teachers."

<sup>4</sup> For example, General school exercise book of Idris Gronow at Radnor Road school and Short Family: English language exercise book, form IVB. (Glamorgan Archives)

justify the cause of war and encourage girls' participation in the efforts. According to Siegel (37), reminding pupils of German atrocities was considered to be one of the foremost moral obligations of all teachers at the time. This anti-German sentiment runs throughout Violet's exercise book: she frequently refers to Germany as "the enemy", while she describes the Kaiser as "the most heartless person I have ever known, quite merciless and very cruel." These statements are met with the laudable "good" from her teacher.

Violet is also regularly asked to comment on the war and how it is progressing. In her responses, male soldiers take centre stage, portrayed as sacrificing themselves for the nation and suffering to defend the country. With roughly 8.7 million soldiers enlisted in the British army during the four years of the Great War, there were few schoolchildren who were not affected on a personal level. Violet was no exception: her eldest brother, William, and several cousins were part of the 164 Labour Company who were posted to France in June 1917. Time and time again, Violet pleads "I hope that this terrible war will soon come to an end" to which her teacher responds "unnecessary". Siegel (143) claims that many believed female concerns concerning the war to be unwarranted because it was a man's patriotic duty to his country. This may account for the teacher's insensitive remarks at Violet's personal opinion.

In other accounts, however, Violet does emphasise the notion of duty, quoting Nelson in saying that "England expects that every man will do his duty" and scorns those who have not taken part in the war efforts. She calls these men "slackers who must feel ashamed of themselves when their children ask them what they did" and goes on to state that "they only care about having fun and do not think about the future." Thus, it is clear that Violet's history lessons focused on the culture of war, delivered by hatred of the enemy, emulation of military heroism, unquestioned devotion to England, promotion of masculine virility, and veneration of fallen soldiers (Siegel 70).

Violet's exercise book also offers a window into the effect of the war on a more local scale. In a news report on what she did at the weekend, Violet reports that she had to queue for almost an hour with a ration ticket to buy cheese. She concludes that "if the queues are not soon stopped, it will be the ruination of many children's education." These first-hand accounts present a new perspective on women's roles in World War One and demonstrate how school exercise books may offer a new way to explore and explain the conflict to young people.

In addition to World War One, anti-Irish sentiment also recurs throughout Violet's exercise book. At the time of writing (12/3/18), Ireland teetered on the cusp of its War of Independence. Teachers used history lessons to emphasise the importance of citizenship in an English-led Empire and unfavourably present events, such as the Easter Rising of 1916, with a strong English bias (Heathorn 95). In an essay on Oliver Cromwell, Violet juxtaposes

him with the Irish to characterise them negatively as an out-group: “there are some people who simply scorn Oliver Cromwell. It is the Irish.” Here, a clear stance is made that separates the English from the Irish. Heathorn (115) argues that this insider/outside dichotomy was integral to the construction of a sense of community and belonging. When interpreting these responses, one must remember that most board school teachers, such as Miss Petherton, were closer socially to their pupils than their superiors. This meant they may have been oblivious to the ideologies of the materials on which they relied or could not actively subvert it due to their own position (Copelman 190).

When considering the representation of gender in school exercise books, it can also be useful to look at feedback practices. The teacher comments provided in Violet’s exercise books indicate that feedback in post-Edwardian board schools was a monologic and unconstructive process in which learners were expected to accept the teacher’s word as final rather than challenge it or ask for clarification. Indeed, Burstall (138) notes that “if a teacher is unwilling to make herself felt, she has no business in the profession, just like a painter who is colour blind.”

Throughout Violet’s exercise book, all feedback and corrections are carried out in red ink. Numerous modern-day studies have found red ink to be more confrontational and negative (Hanks), which has led to many schools banning its use in favour of the more positive green. However, in the early twentieth century, red ink corrections were commonplace in the exercise books of boys and girls. The use of a red pen in boys’ and girls’ exercise books indicates that the choice of colour was not influenced by gender, but rather by a sense of authority which bore witness to institutional attentiveness to things that had been properly or poorly done. The red ink also stood out on the page and could act as a quick and reassuring marker for parents that teachers were paying attention to their children’s work, as well as mobilise children to continue striving. Herman *et al.* (365) argue that the use of red ink also made it clear that the written communication in exercise books was very specific and in that sense differed from day-to-day written communication in other areas of life.

At the beginning of Violet’s book, a list of twelve rules for composition are established. These rules involve issues with singular/plurals, tenses, prepositions, double negatives, and the use of ‘because.’ Throughout the book, if any of these rules are violated, the teacher often inserts the word ‘rules’ next to the mistake (“e.g., clean nails is...”) to ensure that it is not made again. Interestingly, similar boys’ exercise books from the period<sup>5</sup> do not contain such lists, which implies that correct grammar and spelling was deemed more important for girls

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<sup>5</sup> General school exercise book of Idris Gronow at Radnor Road school; Short Family: English language exercise book, form IVB (Glamorgan Archives)

than boys. White (186) supports this point, arguing that these lists were commonplace in girls' exercise books and were seen as non-negotiable truths to be followed unquestionably. This belief may derive from the aforementioned traditional views on girls' behaviour and attitudes.

When providing teacher feedback in the exercise book, Violet's teacher constantly refers back to these rules, coding her messages in a very specific manner, which Violet was expected to know and to which she must respond automatically from her 'insider's view'. Although Miss Petherton was very strict about girls using full sentences (as set out in her list of rules), it is apparent from Violet's book that her teacher did not abide by the same rules when communicating with Violet. Often, a pronounced telegram style is used (e.g., "nothing like best composition") that is stripped of grammatical elements in favour of the main content words. The use of various abbreviations and symbols (e.g., *sp* for spelling and *gr* for grammar) to mark a point to which Violet should attend are other examples of this disobedience. While this telegraphic and abbreviated writing was most likely used due to time constraints, it still highlights a gaping contradiction between how girls and their teachers were expected to perform.

Another notable feature of Violet's exercise book is the lack of praise. Advice manuals of the time suggested that females should not be given praise, as their merits would be discovered in due time if considered worthy (Campbell). To do so before would risk big-headedness. This 'due time' was once a year at Hannah More's prize-giving ceremony when pupils were awarded prizes for attendance and good behaviour. While some compositions receive "good" or "fair" written at the end, most of Miss Petherton's comments consist of negative assessments of performance, handwriting, and neatness. Stronger feedback states "don't you see you keep making the same mistakes" and "your exercise is spoilt by your spelling." This cannot be explained by the fact that Violet Haynes was a bad student, as her school reports indicate that she was diligent, punctual, and had good conduct. Instead, it was believed that the only way for girls to remain hard-working was through perseverance.

Comments also indicate that written texts were expected to have a fixed pattern that began by writing and underlining the date and title at the top of the page. In one exercise where Violet forgets to write the date, the teacher makes use of bold red capitals and a question mark to indicate that the date is missing. These types of corrections are given far more attention in girls' exercise books than boys', perhaps due to the persistent belief that girls were expected to be neat and tidy. Miss Petherton's feedback shows a strong contrast between her emerging views on femininity, represented by her chosen topics, and her traditional expectations of girls in terms of grammar, handwriting, and presentation.

Violet's book also contains numerous examples of what Herman *et al.* (363) call "pointless communication", which involve an unhelpful comment, such as "too many mistakes" or "don't go back in your work" written next to a page of red marks. Boys' exercise books from the period show similar examples. Herman *et al.* (362) argue that these types of comments highlighted an awareness of others' reading. So as not to put their own professional capabilities into doubt, teachers wrote these messages, which placed the deficit with the pupil instead of them. The use of teacher's initials at the end of a page also play a similar function. In these cases, the teacher may not have had time to read the text, but used the initials to acknowledge it in case they were questioned by somebody else. Other aimless responses in Violet's book include crossing out words or sentences or 'drilling and practising' incorrect spelling mistakes. In these cases, no oral feedback accompanied the corrections, nor were reasons put forward as to why the work was unacceptable, meaning that Violet was not able to learn from this mistake in future compositions. This can be seen explicitly through the case of the word 'zephyr', which Violet repeatedly spells incorrectly throughout the book. In her poetry collections from the 1970s, 'zephyr' is still spelt inaccurately more than sixty years later.

In the early twentieth century, LEAs were responsible for formulating their own rules on corporal punishment (Farrell). The only national requirement was that all forms of punishment were recorded in a logbook. While there were wide variations of practice between schools in Bristol, at Hannah More, corporal punishment was only given to boys. This may have been a result of the long-held belief that it was medically dangerous to cane girls who may already be suffering pain as a consequence of menstruation (Burstyn 91). Hannah More school was an exception to other board schools in the Bristol area, as even with boys, it tried to keep physical punishment to a minimum. A record from February 1915, for example, outlines that the teacher Mr Witts struck a boy unnecessarily. He is consequently threatened with dismissal and is advised that "it would be to his advantage to secure a more suitable post."

Despite not being able to physically hit girls, the teachers at Hannah More school were expected to be disciplinarians with "a certain kind of personality that can hit hard and will stand no nonsense" (Burstall 138). A record in the school logbook from July 1912 outlines how the teacher "Miss Noyer was advised to seek a new post," as she was not good at discipline. For the girls at Hannah More school, punishments for misbehaviour ranged from having to stand on a chair for a long period of time or being sent to the headmistress (Hannah More Infants School Log Book, 1870-1893), while for mistakes in the exercise book, writing lines was the most severe punishment given.

In Violet's exercise book, most examples of lines relate to spelling or grammar mistakes (e.g., "there shows place, their shows possession"; "you cannot learn people; you can only teach them" and "the word hurted is not in the dictionary"). On other occasions, Violet is made to repeatedly write famous quotes on a particular behavioural trait (e.g., "experience is a hard schoolmistress, but she teaches well;" "choose not thy work but choose to do it well" and "kind words are the music of the world, fear is ruin and hesitation a destroyer"). It was believed that writing lines was beneficial for pupils, as it reinforced correct rules. However, some modern-day educators have commented that these lines were likely to have hampered pupils' motivation and enthusiasm for school writing (Pachuki). While boys were also given lines for mistakes in exercise books, Hannah More log books show that they were more likely to face other forms of punishment, such as being hit on the knuckles with a wooden ruler. This demonstrates some of the disparities that existed between girls and boys in terms of feedback and punishment practices, often influenced by the view that girls were physically and mentally inferior (Dyhouse 156).

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Previous studies on the education of working-class girls in Britain have failed to consider the importance of the exercise book as a testimonial of schooling in the early twentieth century. As such, they have wrongly portrayed the board school as an institution that gave girls little room to negotiate their feminine identity. The first-hand evidence provided by Violet Haynes' exercise book challenges the oversimplistic and potentially harmful view that girls were passive recipients of education, and demonstrates that, in fact, most girls used the exercise book as a discursive 'safe space' in which to explore their place in the world.

Through the activities in her exercise book, Violet is able to construct her own concept of what it means to be a girl in post-Edwardian Britain, drawing upon both traditional and modernist views to do so. This suggests that activities set by teachers were not merely forced upon girls, but could constitute empowering experiences that enabled them to articulate their own identities. Violet embraces the concept of the New Woman who has changing roles and responsibilities, and a voice in the world of politics, current affairs, and science, but she also maintains traditional views on the importance of morality, hygiene, and bodily health.

When assessing these traditional views, we must not underestimate the impact that Violet's working-class background and the exercise book's transition between public and private space had on her responses. Many of Violet's opinions on health and hygiene may have been written with an awareness of pleasing her teacher, as well as a quest for respectability, and more importantly, survival, that growing up in a working-class slum entailed.

These factors indicate that limiting a study of girls' education to gender is to ignore additional factors, such as class and the multiple users of the exercise book, which had a strong influence on writing practices. Furthermore, when investigating traditional feminine activities, such as letter-writing and poetry, it is important to consider them within a broader context of social discourse. In doing so, we can change our perception of letter-writing as a feminine art form to a well-established and routinised activity with unspoken rules that had to be learnt by girls to get by in life. Equally, we can regard poetry as a subject enjoyed by girls for its content, not because it was inherently 'feminine.' Finally, when exploring the exercise book, we cannot minimise the essential role of Violet's teacher. While Miss Petherton's feedback and punishment practices were more strongly influenced by traditional views on girls as the 'fairer sex', in choosing forward-thinking topics that encouraged debate or acknowledged the important contribution of women to the war efforts, Violet and her classmates were encouraged to step out of their traditional roles and aspire to occupy new positions in post-Edwardian society.

The findings of this case study make it evident that current understanding of the educative experience of working-class girls in post-Edwardian Britain must be adjusted. The exercise book shows that girls were just as intelligent as boys and could offer equally important insights on the way in which the world should be run. The exploration has also highlighted that many traditional views on gender still persist today, especially regarding the different expectations of boys and girls on morality and behaviour, as well as subject stereotypes. Schooling has a direct effect on a child's short-term and long-term achievements, and is responsible for shaping their pathway in life (Sylva 134). Therefore, it is essential that we learn from these negative representations of gender to ensure not only that all girls have a positive educative experience today, but that the classroom is a place of gender equality for all.

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