



Proposal for Senior Honors Thesis

HONS 497 Senior Honors Thesis Credits 2 (2 minimum required)

Directions: Please return signed proposal to the Honors Office **at least one week prior to your scheduled meeting with the Honors Council**. This proposal must be accepted by Honors Council the semester before presentation.

Student's Name: Rebecca Keller

Primary Advisor: Dr. Stephanie Carpenter

Secondary Advisor: Dr. Beverly Matiko

Thesis Title: Women and Work in 1970s America: A Creative Writing Exploration through the Short Story

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Expected date of Graduation: May 2019

I. Provide goals and brief description of your project or research.

Between the 1950s and 1970s, the status of working women in America changed drastically. During World War II, women filled work positions men left when they enlisted in the military. After the war ended in 1945, men returned to their jobs and women retreated to the home. In the 1950s, society emphasized "traditional" family values, with a working father and homemaker mother. Education was sex-segregated, with many high school girls taking classes like home economics, typing, bookkeeping, and business mathematics, which enabled them to work at low-level clerical jobs before becoming full-time homemakers and mothers (Blackwelder 170). As homemaking became the cultural norm for middle class white women, their role in the home focused on providing for their husband and children. Some of these women felt caught in a cycle of purposelessness, parenting, and feelings of emptiness because their goals were limited to cooking, cleaning, and taking care of their family. Often they felt unfulfilled, bored, burnt out, and unenthusiastic about their lives. In 1963, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, which explored these feelings women experienced. Though society told women they were the most "feminine" and most fulfilled as homemakers, many did not feel that way. Friedan argued that women needed an interest outside the home to give them meaning, and suggested women continue their education or find a meaningful job.

With the second wave of feminism in the 1960s, women continued their education at the post-secondary level and sought work outside the home. Working conditions for women, however, did not reach the level of men. Women remained in low-paying clerical jobs, which required no collegiate education or training, and offered little chance of advancement. Clerical work included secretarial duties, such as running personal errands for the boss, making coffee, and providing a shoulder to cry on, all while being treated as a "nonperson" in most other respects. In blue-collar occupations, women worked primarily in unskilled positions and had limited access to vocational education or training programs needed to proceed to the next level. When women and men held comparable jobs, men received higher pay. Women in managerial or professional roles usually were limited to lower-ranking, lower-paying positions. They often were not promoted to managerial roles because of stereotypes that suggested women were passive, meek, and best

suiting for supportive roles, while companies wanted managers who were strong leaders. In addition, male culture dominated the professional workplace, especially informal social networks where much business was conducted; women were often excluded from this culture because of their sex (Fox 141). In addition to these unsatisfactory working conditions, women were also in danger of sexual harassment and assault at all levels of occupation (Farley 25).

In the 1970s, many changes helped women break through these workplace barriers. In 1972, Title IX of the Higher Education Act was passed, prohibiting discrimination based on sex in any federally funded educational program. Access to appropriate education helped women land higher-paying, higher-status jobs. In the same year, the Equal Rights Amendment, prohibiting discrimination based on sex, passed Congress to be ratified by the state legislatures. It is important to note that the amendment did not meet the required number of states needed for ratification; some states introduced equal rights laws separate from the Constitution. Socially, working women became the rule, not the exception.

For my Honors Thesis project, I will compose a collection of short fiction stories that explore the unique challenges of working women in 1971. I chose this date specifically because it allows me to reflect on the workplace culture immediately following the Civil Rights Movement, assassination of civil rights and political leaders, Miss America demonstrations, and Kent State and Jackson State universities protests; and before the rise of feminism, Title IX adoption, and *Roe v. Wade*. In these short stories, I will answer the following research questions:

- What were the challenges working women faced in 1971?
- How did working women balance family and work demands?
- What unique challenges did a professional woman, a pink-collar woman, a minority woman, and a high school-aged girl each face?
- How do the characters' struggles relate to us today? What problems are still pervasive in society today?
- How are these characters similar to working women today? How do they differ?

Specifically, I will explore themes that include sex role socialization in high school; society's views of working women; and workplace problems women faced such as sexual harassment, low pay, glass ceiling, and low respect from their employers.

Though I envision the finished product including eight or nine stories centering on the women in a particular town, in fulfillment of the requirements for this two-credit hour project, I plan on drafting and revising four stories for a total of approximately forty pages. The four stories will be presented from the points of view of four women of varying ages and life stages: a teenaged girl whose interest in the sciences makes her an outcast in high school, a minority woman's experiences at her blue collar job, a mid-thirties professional woman trying to break into a male-dominated field, and a divorcee who must work and provide for her two children at her clerical job.

This project weaves my two disciplines of Social Studies and English and utilizes my knowledge of historical research honed from several history classes and my experience with creative writing.

- II. Outline your methodology. **Please be specific.** How does this achieve your goals and how reliable is it?

The Honors handbook recommends that creative projects take a three-pronged approach identified as the thinking phase, the doing phase, and the reflecting phase:

- a. Thinking phase:
 - i. Selecting, reading and examining comparative short story collections for themes, style, and structure.
 - ii. Researching historical context of 1970s, women, work in the U.S.
 - iii. Reading manuals on how to write historical fiction.

- b. Doing phase:
 - i. Draft short stories.
 - ii. Edit and proofread short stories.
 - iii. Write an introduction that explains why I chose this historical topic and why I chose to write creative short stories instead of a traditional academic history paper.
- c. Reflecting phase:
 - i. Reflect on what I have learned from my historical research and my drafting of the short stories.
 - ii. Write and edit an epilogue which will constitute the “last words” of my project.

I will continue to meet with at least one of my advisors weekly to ensure this project grows and develops in a timely, organized fashion.

- III. Explain in what sense your project is original, unique, or beyond normal senior expectations. How does it relate to current knowledge in the discipline?

As a Social Studies major, I am not required to take HIST 480: Senior Seminar. This project therefore represents a substantial addition to my coursework. This project is unique and original in a number of ways: it departs from the more traditional academic history research paper; it is inherently interdisciplinary in that it combines historical research, literary studies, and creative writing. Though I am not currently pursuing teacher certification, I see in this project certain pedagogical applications that I could use if I were to find myself in the classroom in the years ahead. A scaled down, modified assignment similar to what I am doing could certainly help make history “real” for middle or high school students.

- IV. Include a substantive annotated bibliography of similar or related work.

1. Short Story Collections

Atwood, Margaret. *Moral Disorder*. Anchor, 2008.

Though this is considered a short story collection, these eleven stories focus on one woman’s life, telling a fragment of her life from each decade. Possibly inspired by Atwood’s own life, the main character becomes a writer and publisher, lives with a man who can’t get divorced, raises his children, feuds with his wife, and lives in a farm house in rural Canada for the majority of her life. She struggles with her relationship to her own family as well as her significant other and his family. These stories are narrated in first and third person by the main character, and will serve as valuable examples of key elements of the short story genre, including plot development, characterization, dialogue, and point of view.

----. *Stone Mattress*. McClelland & Stewart, 2014.

Atwood’s short story collection, *Stone Mattress*, is a seemingly misfit grouping of nine stories. The first three stories have the most explicit connection: the three main characters dated each other throughout the 1970s; in the stories, the characters reflect on those relationships in their old age. With the exception of the first three tales, the stories are not connected by characters or similar locations, which is typical in the short story collection genre. Though the characters do not know each other, the stories all feature main characters trying to survive emotionally challenging or strange circumstances. The stories almost have a fantastic or otherworldly feel to them while remaining rooted in a reality that is familiar to the reader.

Choi, Hannah. *Three Syrian Voices: Dismantling “Otherness” Perceptions by Crafting Works of Creative Nonfiction*. April 6, 2018, HONS 497 Honors Thesis. J.N. Andrews Honors Program, Andrews University.

In this Honors thesis, Choi employs a creative nonfiction method to write three short stories about Syrian people who have been displaced to Lebanon. The author utilizes personal stories to break down Western stereotypes of Middle Eastern people and discuss how these stereotypes beget “otherness”. The complete work includes an introduction where she explains the historical and philosophical frameworks of her project; three stories of creative fiction; and an epilogue where she reflects on her experience and project. I plan to structure my thesis in the same way: introduction, my four works of historical fiction, and reflection.

Egan, Jennifer. *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. Anchor Books, 2010.

In this short story cycle, Egan discusses the themes of time, fame, aging, and change in different periods of one’s life through the central characters of Bennie, Sasha, and various friends, coworkers, and rivals. The thirteen stories take place from the 1970s through the present day to an imagined future in the community of the music industry and punk rock. The title, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, is explained in the final story, where Bennie helps his former high school bandmate make it big; he tells his friend that “Time’s a goon, right? You gonna let that goon push you around?” (332). According to Bennie, time is a bully who will beat you up and mistreat you as you age, unless you do something to stop it. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 2011, Egan’s storytelling skills as she leads the audience through the network of Bennie’s high school bandmates, bosses, assistants, wives and children, and Sasha’s college friends, one night stand, and family, help readers question the trajectory of their own lives and whether time is a goon pushing them around. The stories “Ask Me if I Care” and “A to B” are particularly of interest to my project because they are narrated by women and take place in the 1970s.

Hoffman, Alice. *The Red Garden*. Random House, 2011.

In this whimsical portrayal of small town America, Hoffman explores the lore and legends of the imaginary town of Blackwell, Massachusetts and a mysterious garden with red soil. With stories focusing mainly on the strong women descended from the four founding families, this short story collection expands on more than three hundred years of American history, from the mid-18th century to the Civil War to the Great Depression to present day. These stories have a more optimistic tone than *A Visit from the Goon Squad* and *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, perhaps because of the element of mystery in the woods and the scientifically inexplicable nature of the red garden. The author utilizes the symbol of the bear as a commentary on the simultaneous ferocity and gentleness of nature. Themes include the feeling of time standing still, running away from modern life and discovering a simpler life in the town, and the struggle to survive in the harsh wilderness. Each story except for one features a strong female lead, which will serve as a model when crafting my female main characters.

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Interpreter of Maladies*. Houghton Mifflin, 1999.

Lahiri’s short story cycle discusses themes of “otherness”, foreignness, and being part of two cultures while truly belonging to neither. The nine stories focus on Americans of Bengali Indian descent and their struggles in India and America, from family to school to religion to ethnic identity. Of particular interest to this project is the story, “Mrs. Sen’s”, which is about a divorced mother trying to work and take care of her son. I plan to model my clerical working mother on this character of Lahiri’s.

Mueenuddin, Daniyal. *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*. Norton, 2009.

Mueenuddin’s short story cycle discusses the advantages and disadvantages of social station, the dissolution of the old ways, and the shock of change. Set in modern-day feudal Pakistan, these eight stories tell about the lives, loves, gains, and losses of the servants and family members of the wealthy, aging politician K.K. Harouni. Many of the stories involve women falling in love with and gaining favors from men of higher

social status, and when the men die or their wives intervene, the mistress is left worse off than before. One story is written in first person, while the rest are written in third person. Most of the stories end ambiguously, where readers don't know what the character will decide or what will happen next. The ambiguous endings make the stories more reflective of real life as no one knows what will happen in the future. The stories "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders" and "Lily" are particularly relevant to my writing, as the narrators are both female.

2. Historical Resources

Blackwelder, Julia Kirk. *Now Hiring: The Feminization of Work in the United States 1900-1995*. Texas A&M UP, 1997, 147-204.

Chapters Six and Seven of Blackwelder's book about women and work in the twentieth century discuss women's education and work experiences and demographics from the 1950s to 1970s. In the 1950s, home economics and some business classes were the main core of high school classes for girls; this combination of classes would prepare them to work for a few years in a clerical role at a business before giving up their career altogether when they entered motherhood. By the 1970s, traditional female jobs grew to encompass teaching, nursing, and librarianship. The term "pink-collar" in a business setting refers to gender allocation and its inferiority to white-collar occupations. Pink-collar jobs required no collegiate educational training and provided limited advancement opportunities; since women mostly dominated this demographic, it meant that women could be paid less than men for the same job and were often passed over for promotions. With the help of specific gender quotas and employers' willingness to hire women, women in male-dominated professions, such as medicine, engineering, and law, got into professional training programs which helped advance their careers. By the mid-1970s female enrollment in higher education rose while interest in home economics classes dwindled. These two chapters of Blackwelder's book are extremely relevant to my project's research questions and developing a historically accurate work environment for my characters.

Croker, Richard. *The Boomer Century, 1946-2046: How America's Most Influential Generation Changed Everything*. Springboard Press, 2007.

Written by Croker, a Baby Boomer himself, this book discusses the Baby Boomer generation's contribution to the second half of twentieth century America. In particular, I focused on chapters 3-5, which discuss social issues in the 1960s, including the Vietnam War, sexuality, and the Boomer generation's adverseness to authority. Since my characters will be from the Baby Boomer generation, this book gives important context about the viewpoint of people from that generation in the 1960s.

Farley, Lin. *Sexual Shakedown: The Sexual Harassment of Women on the Job*. Warner Books, 1978.

This book provides an extensive overview of the nature of workplace sexual harassment, its history, and anecdotal evidence from the 1960s and 1970s. Part One discusses how sexual harassment works, how widespread it was at the time, and the historical imperatives. Next, it details the experiences of women in nontraditional jobs, including all-male fields, college teaching, and the professions, and sexual harassment in traditional women's jobs, especially hiring policies, the revolving-door attitude, and the experiences of older and younger working women. Part Two explores how women can fight sexual harassment, what public policies were in place at the time of publication, and its relation to employers and unions. I plan to use some of this information to illustrate through fiction the prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace in the 1970s.

Fox, Mary Frank, and Sharlene Hesse-Biber. *Women at Work*. Mayfield, 1984.

This book analyzes the experiences of women in different areas of work (i.e. clerical, blue-collar, professional, managerial). The authors discuss sex-role socialization of children by family and the educational system and how both influential aspects of a young person's life affect male and female perceptions of sex roles and choosing of occupations. The text also probes problems women in clerical and blue-collar occupations encounter, the most important being low pay and few opportunities for advancement. Women in professional or managerial occupations suffered from a similar situation in addition to the hurtful effects of female stereotypes and male culture in the workplace. Minority women at work, the authors postulate, suffered from double discrimination: sex and race and/or national origin, which placed them even lower than white women in terms of pay and position. *Women at Work* will help me discuss problems diverse women in a variety of occupations faced in the early 1970s.

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. W. W. Norton, (1963) 2001.

Published in the early 1960s, Friedan's work challenged the belief in 1950s and 1960s America that women's identities were most feminine and fulfilled as a housewife and mother. Since these housewives typically did not engage in activities where they grew as individuals and pursued more education, they often became stuck in a cycle of purposelessness, parenting, and feelings of emptiness. The results of this kind of oppression of women were plentiful, including increased sexual frustration, boredom, and depression. Friedan encouraged these housewives to seek more education and engage in fulfilling work outside of the home to relieve claustrophobia and the cycles of busywork. This book became a bestseller within a year and is credited with launching the second-wave of feminism. Its influence stretched into the 1970s, when my short stories take place. My characters will challenge and explore the ideas Friedan presents as they seek to balance work and home life and try to find identity as women and employees.

Goldin, Claudia. "The Long Road to the Fast Track: Career and Family." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Vol. 596, Mommies and Daddies on the Fast Track: Success of Parents in Demanding Professions (Nov., 204), pp. 20-35. accessed 17-07-2018.

In this article, Goldin used demographic and labor force experiences of female college graduates to analyze the changes of women choosing between career and family over the 20th century. She separates the 20th century into five "cohorts" of female career maker philosophies: 1900 to 1920, "family or career"; 1920 to 1945, "job then family"; 1946 to mid-1960s, "family then job"; late 1960s to 1980, "career then family"; 1980 to 1990, "career and family". For the purposes of my research, I was most interested in the fourth cohort, the group which graduated in the late 1960s to the late 1970s and aspired to have "career then family." According to the author, a sizable amount of college graduates in this cohort put off marriage for several years after college. These women generally married around 25, which is much later than previous generations. What's noteworthy is that the women who married later deferred marriage instead of avoiding it altogether, which was a common trend in the previous cohorts. Another interesting addition to this trend is that the "dominant occupation for this group [shifted] from teaching to a variety of professions" (26). The shift in dominant occupations is partly because of an increase in "labor-market-relevant college majors for women beginning in the 1970s" and the increase in women's enrollment in professional schools (33). This article will help inform my choices of characters' vocations and college paths.

Prather, Jane. "Why Can't Women Be More Like Men: A Summary of the Sociopsychological Factors Hindering Women's Advancement in the Professions." *Women in the Professions: What's All the Fuss About?*, edited by Linda S. Fidell and John DeLamater. Sage Publications, 1971. Sage Contemporary Social Science Issues 8.

Prather argues that in the American social climate of the 1960s women are at a steep disadvantage when it comes to breaking into traditionally “male” professions and being promoted. Their disadvantage comes from a variety of conceptions perpetuated by society. First, American society saw women either as sexual objects or servants. Thus, traditional “female” occupations were generally limited to secretary or model (women were made to be pretty) or nurse or teacher (women can be paid less for jobs that nurture and care for others). Second, the American definition of work is defined in masculine terms, where men are expected and praised for sacrificing family time for their careers while women who do the same feel guilty because they are socialized to be in the home. Connected to this thought, women are socialized to believe that the place where they become most “feminine” and the best version of themselves is when they are married and take care of a family. As a result, many women focus more energy on being attractive and getting a mate than they do to any sort of career, which might scare away potential partners. This article, now almost fifty years old, voices a reality (sadly, still seen at times today) where society’s idea of what “woman” should be can hinder and shame women into avoiding careers or following fulfillment outside of home life.

3. Guides to Writing Historical Fiction

Clark, Roy Peter. *The Art of X-Ray Reading: How the Secrets of 25 Great Works of Literature Will Improve Your Writing*. Little, Brown, 2016.

In *The Art of X-Ray Reading*, Clark analyzes twenty-five great works of literature and converts the principles behind their success into tips for fiction writers. Among recognizable titles that he “x-rays” are *The Great Gatsby*, *A Christmas Carol*, *The Goldfinch*, and *Lolita*. From F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, Clark discusses the power of location and objects with a powerful meaning or symbolism. Clark also describes how Donna Tartt’s 2013 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Goldfinch* was greatly influenced by Charles Dickens’ writing style and points out that one scene from Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* appears in *The Goldfinch* slightly reworked. From this example, he discusses the difference between plagiarizing great works and borrowing elements—such as tone, language, setting, theme, details—from the influencing piece. From *Lolita*, Clark discusses how characters’ names can be used to describe their characters and how the audible sound of language conveys a certain tone or mood to the reader. This book will be particularly helpful in the “doing” phase of my project.

Thom, James Alexander. *Once Upon A Time It Was Now: The Art and Craft of Writing Historical Fiction*. Blue River, (2010) 2017.

Historical fiction writer James Alexander Thom gives advice on the whole historical fiction writing process in this book. He ponders the relationship of historians and historical fiction writers, the nature of historical accuracy and its relation to fiction and plot, and the difference between historical facts and historical opinions. He also describes some unique ways he conducts research that go beyond library research, including travel, primary sources, historical reenactments, genealogical records, and museums. Moreover, Thom discusses several methods for “taming your research data” (119), such as a wall map, note cards, or documents on a computer. Thom also exemplifies ways to familiarize readers with the different time period by teaching them about things that are new while making them feel like they knew about them all along. There is also a chapter about avoiding the pitfalls of bad historical fiction, including anachronisms, clichés, stereotypes, descriptions, unnatural dialogue. This book particularly informs the creative writing aspect of my project. I will use many of Thom’s suggestions during the “doing” phase of my project.

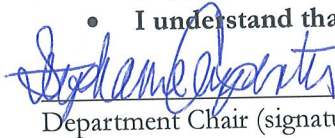
V. Provide a statement of progress to date and list the research methods coursework completed.

In addition to the history and political science courses required for my Social Studies major, along with the SAGES Humanities and Social Sciences components, I have taken HIST 290: History Research Methods, HIST 205: American Experience II, and HIST 469: America as World Power 1939-Present, which are particularly germane to this project.

During my freshman year, in HONS 115H: Transcribing the Self, I drafted and revised one first-person narrative essay. This assignment gave me early exposure to and practice in creative writing. I will take ENGL 467: Creative Writing: Fiction in Spring 2019. The requirements of this course by Dr. Bruce Closser will allow me to draft and revise several more stories for my collection. Currently I have a completed a draft of one story, with the working title, "Linda at Forty."

Department Chair Approval

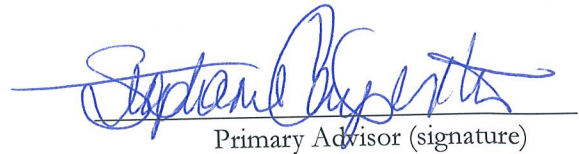
- This student's performance in his/her major field is acceptable.
- He/she has completed the requisite research methods coursework for the research to be pursued.
- I understand that he/she plans to graduate with Honors.



Department Chair (signature)

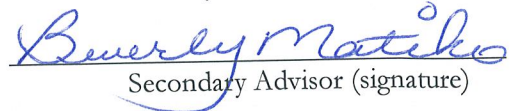
Research Advisor Approval

I have read and support this proposal:



Primary Advisor (signature)

I have read and support this proposal:



Secondary Advisor (signature)

If human subjects or if live vertebrate animals are involved, evidence of approval from the Institutional Review Board or an Animal Use Committee is needed through the campus scholarly research offices (Ext. 6361).