

Hidden in Plain Sight¹

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MICROAGGRESSIONS, BY THEIR definition, are relatively small slights, but, as argued by Simba Runyowa, “they can both telegraph and contribute to the proliferation of more invidious, macro-level prejudices. Implicit biases have serious material consequences beyond hurt feelings.”² Microaggressions can be minor, unconscious practices that serve as a megaphone to communicate more widely held biases: speaking over someone in a meeting or evaluating letters of recommendation differently based on the gender of the candidate. A subtle microaggression I wish to explore is when evidence hides in plain sight but we choose to ignore it. Thought of another way, we touch paintbrush to canvas to depict the forest, but miss half the trees in our rendering, even though we know that those trees are there.

The categories of difference that people experience—gender, race, class, age, ability—and the discrimination that society attaches to those categories—sexism, racism, classism, ageism, ableism—are not contingent upon circumstance. Today, as in the medieval past, gendered experience is not a mantle that we choose to put on one day and take off the next. Rather, experiences are shaped by ideas about those categories of difference, ideas we fight and reinforce: for example, women are good teachers and men manage money well. As scholars, we recognize

1. My thanks to Kit French for this particular phrasing for the title of this article and to the editors for their thoughtful comments and suggestions.

2. “Microaggressions Matter” *The Atlantic*, 18 September 2015 <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/09/microaggressions-matter/406090/>, accessed 12 February 2017.

the biases of the sources we use to understand the past, yet in modern academia we often are blind to the biases we have. This article aims to compare how we approach women who are in plain sight in the written record (then and now) and how we fill silences in those records with assumptions.

Recognizing Bias in Teaching Evaluations

One microaggression in academia today that has received press lately involves students' evaluation of teaching. It is not the process of student evaluation—which is itself flawed in myriad ways—but the weight we place on those evaluations that can magnify into weighty consequences. The particular insidious aggression in this process occurs when we allow the way we *expect* people to act to fill the void in evaluative materials. These evaluative materials, in short, use a yardstick that works when measuring one demographic, but that splinters when measuring other demographics.

Extensive research has concluded that student evaluation of instruction often more reliably measures the students' own biases than the effectiveness of teaching. A recent study, led by Philip B. Stark, Anne Boring, and Kellie Ottoboni, examined 23,000 student evaluations from a French university and compared the data with the dataset from a 2014 study that considered student evaluations from online courses at an American university. They found that male instructors overall received higher scores than female instructors, and in history courses even more than in other disciplines. Male students rated male instructors higher than female instructors in the French university; and female students rated male instructors higher in the US university even though students did worse on final exams with male instructors than with female instructors. The investigators concluded that “SET [student evaluations of teaching] are influenced more by instructor gender and student grade expectations than by teaching effectiveness.” Stark wrote that he hopes universities will use this research to understand that more needs to be taken into account in employment decisions than student evaluations; if not, lawyers will.³

3. Anne Boring, Kellie Ottoboni, Philip B. Stark, “Student Evaluations of

Indeed, the consequences can move beyond lawsuits over tenure cases, but can also play a role in perpetuating an academia that inculcates gender inequity in the professoriate, especially as one moves from associate to full professor.⁴

This is not the only study on the topic. In an informal study of RateMyProfessor.com, Ben Schmidt, an assistant professor of History at Northeastern University, created an interactive chart that considers gender bias in evaluations on that website. When one types in

Teaching (Mostly) Do Not Measure Teaching Effectiveness,” *ScienceOpen Research*, <https://www.scienceopen.com/document?vid=818d8ec0-5908-47d8-86b4-5dc38f04b23e>, accessed 11 February 2017. For a shortened analysis of their longer article, see their blog “Student Evaluations of Teaching Are not Only Unreliable, They are Significantly Biased Against Female Instructors,” The London School of Economics and Political Science, *LSE Impact Blog*, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2016/02/04/student-evaluations-of-teaching-gender-bias/>, accessed 12 February 2017. Colleen Flaherty, “Bias Against Female Instructors,” *Inside Higher Ed*, 11 January 2016, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/01/11/new-analysis-offers-more-evidence-against-student-evaluations-teaching>, accessed 11 February 2017. See also Bob Uttl, Carmela A. White, Daniela Wong Gonzalez, “Meta-Analysis of Faculty’s Teaching Effectiveness: Students’ Evaluation of Teaching Ratings and Student Learning are not Related,” *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, in press, available at: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0191491X16300323>, accessed 12 February 2017. For an example of such a lawsuit, see Catherine Joritz against the University of Kansas, story in Peter Schmidt, “When Students’ Prejudices Taint Reviews of Instructors,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 13 January 2017, <http://www.chronicle.com/article/When-Students-Prejudices/238892?key=u3d13dQRSKsxDuUp14YxCRflItw9ugwSJcjkheIXQyDUslbamST4Y6n2yK2gXap2LWU0WEw1ODRXZDFZT1JLM21sSndQSEnzTjN5eVplNWY0ZIFPakFmakNTMA>, accessed 12 February 2017.

4. For a recent study that tracks the increasing gender imbalance among the professoriate from hire to full promotion, see Modern Language Association, “Standing Still: The Associate Professor Survey,” 27 April 2009, https://www.mla.org/content/download/3120/80834/cswp_final042909.pdf, accessed, 12 February 2017.

gendered descriptors, the results suggest a strong gender bias in evaluation: women professors are described as unreasonable (negative) but also organized (positive) more often than men are; men are described as funny and smart more often than women are (you can input your own descriptor into the chart).⁵ Women tend to be rated higher on teaching evaluations if they conform to gender expectations: they are rated more highly if they are seen as caring and less authoritative. Men tend to be rated higher if they are seen as amusing and confident.⁶ Although the studies to date focus on gender predominantly, race, age, and other factors also play a role when students evaluate their instructors.

We need to think harder about the constraints of the categories we employ, and we need to think more broadly about evaluative measures. Joey Sprague argues that we should craft questions in evaluations more carefully so that students are able to answer based on their knowledge. For instance, instead of asking students to evaluate the instructor's expertise, which they would have difficulty measuring, we could ask students to rate the instructor on a measure such as, "The instructor returns graded assignments within two weeks of when you handed them in."⁷ Sprague argues that students have the capability to evaluate their instructor on that question in light of their experience within that particular class.

Another active approach we can take to counter this microaggression

5. Ben Schmidt, "Gendered Language in Teaching Evaluations," <http://benschmidt.org/profGender>, accessed 15 February 2017.

6. The 2014 North Carolina State study examines this feature: see Lillian MacNell, Adam Driscoll, and Andrea N. Hunt, "What's in a Name: Exposing Bias in Student Ratings of Teaching," *Innovative Higher Education* 40, no. 4 (2015): 291–303, and includes a review of the literature on bias in student evaluations.

7. Joey Sprague, "The Bias in Student Course Evaluations," *Inside Higher Ed*, 17 June 2016. Thank you to Melanie Page for this reference, and to the Women's Leadership Initiative Workshop that she and Jen Martin organized on this topic 8 December 2016 at West Virginia University. Sprague provides other helpful ideas to instructors for how to mitigate the negative effect of bias-rich evaluative data when reporting their evaluation scores as well as how to read statistical data to uncover bias.

is to encourage a more comprehensive evaluative process for teaching. Student evaluations can be one measure of effectiveness for the review process. However instead of placing the onus on the faculty member to explain the subjective nature of these measures, we could suggest that additional materials be included in a faculty member's file. While scholars have presented alternative methods of evaluation along these lines, we should encourage the deployment of multiple types of evaluation to assess teaching.⁸ These might include peer observation; assessment by a campus teacher-training center of syllabi, instructor-created content, activities, and assignments; informal evaluations where the instructor can shape the questions more directly; attendance at professional development workshops; teaching awards and recognition; funding awards to support teacher development.

Working Wives to Rework the Past

Just as our categories of analysis to evaluate teaching in universities appear inhibited by the limitations of the evaluative systems utilized, we are similarly constrained by frameworks when we approach women in archival and other records from medieval cities—such as attitudes found in prescriptive literature and presumptions about legal status—when we approach women in archival and other records from medieval cities. As a result, broader narratives tend to (with exceptions) paper over women active in the past. If we, instead, allow ourselves to see the women in the sources, and not how they are categorized (similar to adjusting measures to evaluate teaching to filter out bias), a more vibrant story of the urban past will emerge.

Although misogynist literature loudly proclaims the presence of working wives in medieval cities—they were avaricious, garrulous, and gossipy⁹—histories of urban spaces are often populated only by men:

8. For instance, Carl Wieman proposed an inventory of materials drawn on teaching practices that could work for STEM and non-STEM disciplines and which could be quantitatively analyzed. See Wieman, "A Better Way to Evaluate Undergraduate Teaching," *Change* (January/February 2015): 6–15.

9. Katherine L. French, "Nouveaux arts de la table et convivialités sexuées," *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire* 40 (2014): 45–67. For an oft-cited

those who occupied positions in politics, guild administration, universities, and other spaces almost always barred to women. Demographically speaking, in cities and villages alike, there were plenty of married women. Between 80 and 90 percent of women in the late Middle Ages would have expected to be married; depending upon where they lived in Europe, they would have married either in their late teens/early twenties (southern Europe), or in their mid to late twenties (northwestern Europe). As Maryanne Kowaleski has explained, the age at first marriage would have influenced the life experiences of those women (and men), as did whether they lived in a village or a town or a city.¹⁰ Although more women in urban areas remained unmarried—likely due to the availability of labor in towns—statistically, singlewomen represented the minority experience for women in the Middle Ages.¹¹ Most women would have expected to find a partner and work together to ensure survival of their household.

Marriage itself was an ideal reflected in contemporary literature for its positive attributes: specifically, marriage brought stability through the conjugal partnership. The popular Griselda story, which was often used to exemplify the obligation of wifely obedience and is included in a popular bourgeois manual written by a husband to his wife, reflects this idea of marital stability. The lord in the story, the marquis of Saluzzo, is encouraged by his vassals to marry in order to persuade him to focus

example of a medieval poem that discusses ill-behavior by women, see “How the Goodwife Taught Her Daughter”: George Gordon Coulton, *Social Life in Britain from the Conquest to the Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918, rpt. 1919, 1938, 1968), 446–51. See also Ann Christensen, “Merchant Wives, Agency, and Ambivalence in Early Modern Studies,” *Early Modern Women* 3 (Fall 2008): 217–23, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2354153>, who argues that, although there is evidence to support merchant wives as partners with their husbands in early modern England, much of the literature displaces critiques of capitalism unequally upon the female side of the economic partnership.

10. Maryanne Kowaleski, “The Demographic Perspective,” in *Singlewomen in the European Past 1250–1800*, ed. Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 39–40.

11. *Ibid.*, 49–50.

on domestic matters. The marquis's subjects beg him "to submit your heart to the bonds of marriage and that your past liberty be somewhat restrained and brought within the laws of marriage." The plea, most directly, reflects a concern that their lord might provide an heir, but an earlier passage suggests they were also concerned for him to settle down in order to bring his attention to government.¹² The household was the microcosm of the larger society, and a wife brought peace and order. Yet, as Sharon Farmer has clarified, "clerical authors have often failed to recognize the importance of women's productive labor for the marketplace, especially when the women in question were married."¹³ I would suggest that it is not just medieval clerical authors who failed to write about these women and their experiences, but it is our broader narratives that efface these women as well.

Married women were therefore present in public spaces, but traditional narratives of the previous century, with few exceptions, tended to take note of women only when their voices were present in the historical record: nuns, heretics, and elite women, for example. When their voices were absent, prescriptive sources and literature usually determined the narrative: men worked, and women were helpmeets to their superiors, obedient and unobtrusive.¹⁴ Fortunately, because more recent scholars have become adept at developing alternative tools and methods to reveal unnamed women in the marketplace and public square, we have adjusted our approach. In addition, by isolating examples of gender inequality that derived from the multifaceted and pernicious patriarchal structures of society at the time, scholars have been able to trace phenomena such

12. *The Good Wife's Guide*, ed. and trans. Gina L. Greco and Christine M. Rose (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 106. Greco and Rose point out the ambivalent discussion about the relationship of marriage throughout *Le Ménagier de Paris*, of which Griselda is one part, in their introduction which involves both equal and unequal partnership. See *ibid.*, 33–34.

13. Sharon Farmer, *Surviving Poverty in Medieval Paris: Gender, Ideology, and the Daily Lives of the Poor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 117.

14. See, for example, Farmer's discussion of the presentations of men and women in sermon literature, especially in terms of productive and reproductive labor respectively. Farmer, *Surviving Poverty in Medieval Paris*, 107–13.

as the persistence of unequal wages, the restrictions of women under coverture, and the exclusion of women from patrimonial inheritance or serving in political office.¹⁵

However, scholars still often fail to recognize the women hidden in plain sight in the records. This is because we are blinded, in a sense, by those same structural impediments and prescriptive sources. Similar to the failure to recognize the ever-growing pile of research to indicate that SETs are not reliable alone for evaluative purposes, the significant presence of women in medieval sources goes largely unnoticed in mainstream narratives. When we actively read *past* the women in the records because we are looking for exceptional women or are bound too tightly by our gendered assumptions of their absence, we contribute to the reification of history as a story of men's experience dotted with the occasional woman here and there. If, instead, we make use of the wealth of studies of working urban women that have been published, we have opportunities to ask new questions, to interrogate the women populating the records, and perhaps even to let those women drive the analysis.

While it is a well-established fact that women helped their husbands and families in both urban and rural environments, this help has often been described as supplemental and gendered, especially in the early years of the women's movement in historical scholarship. In 1986, for instance, Barbara Hanawalt noted that in manorial records, all labor in the peasant household was supplemental and argued for a more or less equal partnership in marriage, but one "within which gender ordinarily determined the division of labor."¹⁶ Scholarship on urban spaces

15. For strong examples, see Sandy Bardsley, "Women's Work Reconsidered: Gender and Wage Differentials in Late Medieval England," *Past & Present* 165 (1999): 3–29, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/651283>; Sharon Farmer, "Merchant Women and the Administrative Glass Ceiling in Thirteenth-Century Paris," in *Women and Wealth in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Theresa Earenfight (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 89–108; and Judith Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

16. Barbara A. Hanawalt, *The Ties that Bind: Peasant Families in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 115–120, 154–55, quotation at 155. More recently, our analysis of this relationship has enjoyed

reinforced the idea of supplemental female labor. In the sources for the *Miracles of Saint Louis* in Paris, Sharon Farmer found that women's productive labor was most often described as crucial for survival, but supplemental to the husband's, whose productive work was valued to a greater extent.¹⁷ Likewise, Martha Howell noted that "In the course of a few days a housewife might brew ale and sell her surplus, make clothing for household members, help her husband in his shop, and teach her daughter how to spin fine woolen yarn for merchants," and she emphasized that most of women's work was completed within the household economy.¹⁸ Stephen Epstein also asserted that "The fact that guilds seldom permitted women to become masters did in the end relegate them to the least-skilled and certainly least-remunerative aspects of the trade."¹⁹ This wealth of scholarship suggests that wives were active and working within limiting structures.

Many feminist or revisionist scholars have refocused the analytical lens to note the women present in the records: women were suing in court, acting as executors for their husbands, hiring out their labor (as men also did), and dominating certain lower-wage crafts. Further, we have learned in the last twenty to thirty years that the lack of women in guild rolls or guild leadership is not the same thing as women not working in those industries; and lower wages, while significant to note, does

greater nuance. Judith Bennett has expanded Olwen Hufton's concept of an *economy of makeshifts* to encourage us to think about how household flexibility helped its members adapt to shifting economic situations. Although in Bennett's discussion, unmarried Cecilia employs others to fulfill these adaptive roles, most married women would have been expected to do so.

Judith Bennett, *A Medieval Life: Cecilia Penifader of Brigstock, c. 1295-1344* (Boston, MA: McGraw Hill, 1999), 21, 87-100.

17. Farmer, *Surviving Poverty in Medieval Paris*, 135.

18. Martha Howell, *Women, Production, and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 10, 198-222, 215-16. See also, Martha Howell, *The Marriage Exchange: Property, Social Place, and Gender in Cities of the Low Countries, 1300-1550* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

19. Stephen Epstein, *Wage Labor and Guilds in Medieval Europe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 122-23.

not equate with little impact or import. For example, David Herlihy's classic *Opera Muliebria* highlighted women in the *gynaeceum* and those noted by occupation or as household heads in late medieval tax records.²⁰ At one point, he argues for a decline in women's work based on the Parisian *taille* because there are fewer incidents of the notation of their occupation.²¹ We know now that this is a matter of underrepresentation in the sources rather than a decline in independent women's work. That is, in the past we have been blinded by our analytic categories and we are coming around to new ways of seeing. Scholars also now note that premodern women could pursue a livelihood alongside, not only as a complement to, their husbands,²² could often expect to inherit businesses upon the deaths of their husbands or fathers,²³ and were deeply involved in managing finances and labor in the workshop.²⁴ Barbara Hanawalt has argued convincingly that married women were active in

20. David Herlihy, *Opera Muliebria: Women and Work in Medieval Europe* (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 1990), chaps. 4 and 7.

21. *Ibid.*, 176.

22. Margorie McIntosh, "The Benefits and Drawbacks of *Femme Sole* Status," *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 3 (July 2005): 410–438, doi:10.1086/429708.

23. For example, of all commercial property, such as a shop, bequeathed in the Husting Wills between 1300 and 1500, 23 percent went to wives and 19 percent to daughters (30 percent to sons and 28 percent to other relatives and business partners): Kate Kelsey Staples, *Daughters of London* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 75–76. See also Staples, "Identifying Women Proprietors in Wills from Fifteenth-Century London," *Early Modern Women* 3 (Fall 2008): 239–43, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23541536>; and Sharon Farmer, "Merchant Women and the Administrative Glass Ceiling," 90.

24. The scholarship on married women in workshops and market space in the early modern period is especially rich. For two examples, see Jacob D. Melish, "The Power of Wives: Managing Money and Men in the Family Businesses of Old Regime Paris," in *Women and Work in Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. Daryl Hafer and Nina Kushner (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 77–90; and Merry Wiesner Wood [Hanks], "Paltry Peddlers or Essential Merchants? Women in the Distributive Trades in Early Modern Nuremberg," *The Sixteenth-Century Journal* 12, no. 2 (1981): 3–13, doi:10.2307/2539498.

family businesses in London.²⁵ Marjorie McIntosh has concluded that in England, although married women could petition to trade as *femme soles*, separate from the debts and encumbrances of their husbands, they often did not do so as it was more convenient legally to trade as a partner with their husbands.²⁶ P. J. P. Goldberg has stated plainly that married women in cities and towns “regularly assisted their husbands in the workshop, and were probably more directly involved in the market economy, whether selling the products of the shared workshop, engaged in commercial brewing or processing woolen yarn.” He argued that merchant and artisan wives would have had a greater say in household management as a result than their rural counterparts.²⁷

Despite all of this research, as Sheilagh Ogilvie has suggested, “empirical information on married women’s work in pre-industrial societies is extremely scarce. . . . Married women are among the most invisible of producers, even more in the past than the present. Almost all historical sources subsume their work under that of their husbands.”²⁸ This is because of the gendered nature of work in some circumstances, certainly. Yet, it is also because we analyze sources in such a way that blinds us to women’s presence.

Anne Griffiths provides such an example. Anne appears in a Chancery record from the 1530s in London. Although we would not look for her to be there, because, in theory, married women are subsumed by their husbands (e.g., William Blackstone clearly tells us that upon

25. Hanawalt, *The Wealth of Wives: Women, Law, and Economy in Late Medieval London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 65, and chaps. 8 and 11.

26. McIntosh, “The Benefits and Drawbacks of *Femme Sole* Status,” 410–38.

27. P. J. P. Goldberg, “The Fashioning of Bourgeois Domesticity in Later Medieval England,” in *Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing and Household in Medieval England*, ed. Maryanne Kowaleski and P. J. P. Goldberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 137. See also his *Women, Work, and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire c. 1300–1520* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

28. Sheilagh Ogilvie, *A Bitter Living: Women, Markets, and Social Capital in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 140–41.

marriage husband and wife were legally one: “the legal existence of the woman is suspended”²⁹), yet there she is. In this record, Anne’s husband, John Griffiths, is suing Michael Sowdeley for not repaying money owed him. In a fairly routine debt case, John pursues Michael across three parchment pieces (suit, Michael’s answer, and John’s answer) for nine pounds. What is interesting, however, is that in his effort to explain how he has been wronged, he provides incredible detail of a particular married woman, her activities, and her surroundings. John explains in his deposition that he often goes abroad to fairs and markets to conduct business and that his wife, Anne, stays in Bristol, “to sell his wares in his absens.” In this case, he explains that he was in Wales at a fair and Anne, with his “confidence and truste,” loaned ten pounds from the sale of his goods to Michael. He expounds that she collected 20 shillings as partial return payment a year later, and when she went back again for the rest, Michael “utterly refusid.” Throughout the record, John often repeats that he did not know about Anne’s loan to Michael, and states that because of this lack of knowledge he does not have a case under common law (hence why he is pursuing Michael in Chancery, an equity court). Michael’s response is that the bill is “untrue uncertain and insufficient” and “contryved of pure malice . . . to put hym to vexacion troble coste and expence.” Although Michael is answering to the bill of complaint lodged by John, he mentions Anne repeatedly throughout, denies her actions, and even refers possibly to a long-standing sour relationship (i.e., the complaint was levied out of “olde rankor”) between Michael and the married couple.

As with many equity cases, we do not have a ruling on this litigation. The lack of a conclusion, however, is less interesting than the details about what Anne was doing. Michael painstakingly denies each charge of alleged dealings with Anne, calling them all false. In his reply, John again asserts the just nature of his case, the appropriate place of the case before the court of Chancery, and reiterates, as Michael did, that Anne stood at the center of this business deal: “the said Anne wiff unto this

29. William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England, 1765-1769*, bk. 1, chap. 15, pt. 3, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/blackstone_bk1ch15.asp, accessed 15 February 2017.

complaynant delyverid unto the said deff. the said sum of x li. savelly to kepe to the use of the said Anne to be redelyverid unto the said Anne when . . . that she shall requere the same and that the said Anne recyvid xx. s. parcell of the said x. li.” John also lobs another charge at Michael, that of perjury, for denying his dealings with Anne specifically. Anne, her husband asserts, is due the money she loaned when she saw fit to collect it.³⁰ Here is a run-of-the-mill debt case that illustrates a married woman’s activities: she loans money, pursues an installment and repayment, and has the full trust of her husband to operate his business on his behalf. Michael denied there was a debt to repay in the first place, but did not deny Anne’s role in the workplace.

Despite the obvious, and well-established, presence of women in many different types of records as highlighted by scholars, including the equity lawsuit above, our mainstream narratives have been slow to discuss women in cities. In *Civilization in the West*, a major textbook used in survey courses, for example, the chapter on medieval urban development has hardly broken away from the “add women and stir” approach.³¹ The authors replicate categories that actively erase women: they explain communes and merchants to their student audience, and the masculinization of the cloth industry, relegating women’s presence in towns to sumptuary legislation and Heloise’s affair with Abelard.³² Another text slightly more blatantly includes women with which to stir. In *The West: Encounters and Transformations*, the authors discuss the role of women making clothing in the countryside. However, they do not mention women’s role in urban spaces at the time.³³ Finally, a western civilization textbook that is popular among graduate instructors at my

30. The National Archives, C1/966/31–33.

31. See Merry Wiesner-Hanks’ comment on this for early modern Europe in “Gender Theory and the Study of Early-Modern Europe,” in *Practices of Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Megan Cassidy-Welch and Peter Sherlock (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009) 15.

32. Mark Kishlansky, Patrick Geary, and Patricia O’Brien, *Civilization in the West*, vol. 1, 7th ed. (London: Pearson, 2009), 264–73.

33. See chap. 10, “Medieval Civilization: The Rise of Western Europe,” in Brian Levack, Edward Muir, and Meredith Veldman, *The West: Encounters and Transformations*, vol. 1, 4th edition (London: Pearson, 2014), 298–304.

institution, *A History of Western Society*, actively addresses women's work, but places it as ancillary to the activities of men. The authors explain that women were "often selling the goods [their] husband[s] had produced," and make a point of stating that "The fact that women were not formally guild members did not mean that they did not work in guild shops, however, for alongside the master's wife and daughters female domestic servants often performed the lesser-skilled tasks."³⁴ *A History of Western Society* at least devotes an entire paragraph to women's activity. A more robust discussion of women in urban spaces comes from a text that has not yet reached the mainstream classroom. Katherine French and Allyson Poska changed the framework by seeing the development of urban spaces through women's experiences specifically, while mentioning the limits placed on those experiences because of patriarchal legal structures. In their narrative, women played an important role in founding towns in Iberia, widows were active in Genoese commerce, women practiced medicine in Salerno, and city life in general offered opportunities to them not present in the countryside.³⁵

Oftentimes, our own familiarity and expertise with certain sources restricts our view of the people within them. For instance, David Nicholas in his *The Later Medieval City* reserves his discussion of women in urban spaces for a later chapter that is designed to deal with "The Legal Marginals of the Medieval City."³⁶ He focuses here on legal wards and those made marginal by European legal structures. Yet, this can have the effect of marginalizing these individuals in two ways: they are both relegated to the periphery in a study of cities and the researcher is also

34. John P. McKay, Bennett D. Hill, John Buckler, Clare Haru Crowston, and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *A History of Western Society*, vol. 1, 9th ed. (New York, NY: Bedford St. Martin's, 2009), 335. Women appear later in the chapter in a clause that suggests women did the shopping, briefly highlights Heloise and Abelard, and mentions the Poor Clares and beguines.

35. In contrast, in *A History of Western Society*, the authors do not mention women practitioners in their description of medical practice, 351–52. Katherine L. French and Allyson M. Poska, *Women and Gender in the Western Past*, vol. 1 (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2007), 170–72.

36. David Nicholas, *The Later Medieval City: 1300–1500* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), chap. 8.

blinded to where they might be in the sources because she does not expect to see them there. The intrinsic bias is not dissimilar to that experienced in student evaluations of teaching: because of the weight of assumptions based on expectations of cultural “norms,” the researcher and reader are less likely to explore alternative forms of assessment or read sources against the grain, activities that could provide a different picture.

In many survey textbooks and urban-specific syntheses, then, when we present women, we look for those who dominate, manage, control, lead—a relic of the early feminist search for heroines to highlight—or those dominated, managed, controlled, led (by focusing on structures and prescriptions). To that end, we have studied women-only guilds, women-dominated trades like ready-made food distribution (huckstering) or ale brewing, or the fact that women were often excluded structurally from opportunities.³⁷ Instead, all women deserve a history. We know they were there. Now, we need to refocus the lens in order to include them and better understand the lived experience of both men and women in the past as a result.³⁸ We can achieve this through the study of working women. For example, from Ruth Mazo Karras’s work on prostitution we learn more of medieval culture.³⁹ In addition, Kathryn L. Reyerson has studied women market-sellers’ networks in Montpellier through legal disputes over commercial property. She argued that lawsuits reveal business networks on the main market square that operated both horizontally and vertically and involved women—both wives and single women—at every level. Perhaps the market activity of these women was not what brought the most wealth to Montpellier,

37. For example, Keith D. Lilley, *Urban Life in the Middle Ages 1000-1450* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 238–39.

38. Many have argued this, clearly, but Laurel Thatcher Ulrich gave voice to this idea explicitly in *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History* (New York, NY: Random House, 2007), xxviii.

39. Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). Judith Bennett’s Cecilia Penifader is another example where we learn of rural life through the exceptional life of a singlewoman. *A Medieval Life: Cecilia Penifader of Brigstock, c. 1295-1344* (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 1999).

but Reyerson explained that their active presence in this public space provided for stability and longevity of the market space itself.⁴⁰ In other words, studying women's activity in the market provides a new understanding of that same space and of the multifaceted market networks active in Montpellier. James Murray and Shennan Hutton, among others, have also found women to have been an active presence on the market square and in market halls in medieval Bruges and Ghent, respectively.⁴¹ My point more directly is that if we shed the now-dated "add women and stir" framework and break free from the fetters of the legal status of women, we may walk away with a broader understanding of urban life. "Seeing" the women in the records and writing inclusively will avoid replicating those structures of oppression that we have become adept at identifying, and by extension, this approach will hopefully lead to a richer understanding of the past.⁴²

Wielding Knowledge to See Anew

To pick up the metaphor with which I began, rather than paint the largest pines in the forest, let us begin the project again. We know that evidence can be read to see individuals—men and women—who did not have a hand in creating the evidence, just as we know we can read past, and account for, biases in the modern workplace. A more comprehensive

40. Kathryn L. Reyerson, *Women's Networks in Medieval France: Gender and Community in Montpellier, 1300-1350* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), esp. chap. 7.

41. James M. Murray, *Bruges, Cradle of Capitalism, 1280-1390* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 306-10; and Shennan Hutton, *Women and Economic Activities in Late Medieval Ghent* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 116-17. Murray argues for greater gender equality in the marketplace in Bruges than in northern Italy.

42. Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton make a similar argument for revising our world history narratives with greater inclusion of the rich work of the historians of the body: "Postscript: Bodies, Genders, Empires: Reimagining World Histories," in *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History*, ed. Antoinette Burton and Tony Ballantyne (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005): 405-20.

evaluation of teaching can avoid harmful microaggressions; a consideration of the past through women's experience will render a more comprehensive understanding of that past for students. Eleanor of Aquitaine's story tells us more about the elite as a class than about most women's experiences. We might do better to consider married women's experiences in order to understand the past. Anne Griffiths was a working wife in the workshop of a secondhand dealer. She was legally cloaked by coverture, yet there she was managing the workshop. Her experience of wrangling with a debtor reveals much about life in the workshop and operations of credit, which a majority of women and men experienced. In the same way that without care and mindfulness we can be bound by categories of analysis that force us to train our focus on elite or free or single women, student evaluations often tell us as much about students' expectations as they do the instructors' strengths and weaknesses. As we use more analytical tools to "see" more women and men in the past and the power structures propping them up (or pushing them down), we might reflect on faculty teaching through a variety of metrics to learn more about that teaching and its effectiveness. We all should try a wider lens in both instances and capture a deeper understanding and appreciation of the past and the people around us.

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