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Student Research Article

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ABSTRACT

The 19th century was an era of social reform, particularly in regard to women. Religious middle- to upper-class women joined forces in an effort to end prostitution and immoral crimes. In an attempt to "heal" prostitutes and other delinquents, reformers founded institutions including maternity homes. The Evansville Home for the Friendless was one such maternity home, established in 1870 and operating for almost 100 years. The Home for the Friendless housed unmarried mothers and wrote logbook entries detailing the lives of others whom the women judged to be morally felonious. The matrons in charge of the Home for the Friendless and similar maternity homes wrote descriptions of "inmates," and their records reveal as much about the writers as about the inmates. The judgments and biases shown by matrons toward the "fallen women" are astounding and expose unexpected and unexplored sexism. Evansville's Home for the Friendless serves as a prime example of how female reformers harmed the women they were trying to assist using methods that have transcended time and are still in use today.

KEY WORDS Reform; Home for the Friendless; Eleanor Johnson; Victorian America; Evansville

The past is at the mercy of historians. In the same way that historians dictate what history is recorded, their records dictate what researchers can access. Further, people cannot explore a topic when there are not sources to aid their research. Women's studies, as a discipline, is disproportionately hindered because it does not have an equal, easily accessible multitude of sources compared to histories about men. For that reason, historians must work harder to properly complete a narrative about women. Common people often do not "make the cut" into historical records, and common women receive

significantly less attention, if only because the records do not exist to support research. Regardless of the difficulty, the historian's job is to ensure that voices are not silenced in history. We do not know enough about the everyday people in Victorian society, and we undeniably do not know enough about non-elite women of the same time period. The majority of the research published regarding women in history summarizes the acquiescent roles of women as well as their oppression by men; however, historians must not limit their research to a two-dimensional analysis of the victimization of women.

Sources are limited about female delinquency in Victorian America, and I would not have been able to carry out my research and complement the records from Evansville's Home for the Friendless without the aid of texts such as Barbara Hobson's *Uneasy Virtue* (1987), Regina Kunzel's *Fallen Women, Problem Girls* (1993), and Mary Odem's *Delinquent Daughters* (1995). Through placing maternity home records in the context of Victorian America, this article intends to highlight the work of reformers as well as to accentuate the evident flaws in their methods.

In this article, I use Evansville's Home for the Friendless, also known as the Vanderburgh Christian Home, as a case study to explore the effects of the women's reform movement. The Home for the Friendless was a maternity home, which was an institution intended to house misfortunate women, who were most commonly unmarried mothers. The institution opened March 18, 1870, through the combined efforts of Eleanor Johnson and Willard Carpenter. Most maternity homes and similar reform institutions approached women through the Christian influence, which complemented the conservative social values of the Victorian era. Like other reform homes during that time, the Home for the Friendless endeavored to transform delinquent girls and women into more "acceptable" versions of themselves so they could be rehabilitated and play "proper" roles in society.

I utilize the logbook records from the Vanderburgh County Christian Home (hereafter cited as Home log, WLA, VCH) to illustrate arguments throughout my analysis. The logbooks left behind from the Home of the Friendless contain the information of all inmates in the home between its opening in 1870 and its closing in 1908, with the exception of several gaps. Details including the inmates' names, ages, marital circumstances, and adoption records are listed in the logbooks, as is additional genealogical information that makes these records of particular interest for living descendants. The most telling piece of the story of the Home for the Friendless, however, is matron descriptions of the inmates. Logbook entries were the matron's duty; therefore, the matron would write down her impression of each girl as well as her version of the girl's story. These details reveal information about individual women and the atmosphere around them, including societal values regarding domestic life and gender roles. Women's historian Elizabeth Pleck (2004:7) argues the effect of the family ideal, which, according to her, involves upholding an appearance of familial harmony on the outside even if problems existed behind closed doors. I expand on Pleck's hypothesis by demonstrating the effect of the family ideal in the name of societal harmony instead of solely harmony within the domestic sphere. A full analysis would not be complete without addressing the reformers, because they spearheaded the movement surrounding

"immoral" women. I am contributing an innovative perspective on the morality of reformers through my unique use of the logbook entries. Through reading between the lines of logbook entries, I am beginning a new chapter in American history that can be addressed by future historians. Finally, I analyze the overall effect of sexuality shaming on women as perpetrated by fellow women. Coloring the protagonists in a story of reform as perpetrators of moral crimes against women is a hefty accusation to make, but my research indisputably proves that there is another side to their story that has been covered up under an umbrella of reform.

Two categories of women typically arrived at maternity homes: women who voluntarily sought assistance, and women forcibly detained in institutions as punishment. The Evansville Home for the Friendless welcomed not only unmarried mothers but also "delinquent" girls and women. The actions that made maternity home inmates "delinquent" expose what was taboo during the Victorian era. Given the conservative nature of the late 19th century, delinquency was most commonly related to sexual impurity or to acting "unwomanly." Inmate stories reveal the lack of justice in the law toward women at this time. Matrons used an assortment of labels such as "fallen" or "diseased" to describe inmates, but the one label that accompanied every inmate regardless of the situation was "guilty." Inmate stories reveal their own personal histories but also offer a history of female justice in Victorian America.

Inmate stories are unfortunately incredibly biased, considering the inmates did not have a say in the presentation of their stories. All records can offer is a secondhand history of the inmates from the matrons' perspectives. One of the most common phrases used to label inmates was "fallen," as in "fallen angel." The idea was that these girls were pure and innocent but fell from grace once they participated in premarital sex. Losing innocence was perhaps the greatest moral crime that an unmarried woman could commit, and many women ended up in maternity homes to avoid condemnation, or as part of ongoing condemnation. Women could seek refuge in maternity homes to escape societal scrutiny or ostracism from their family and peers, but in return, they would be exposed to the judgment and scrutiny of the matrons and staff. Judgment was inevitable, but the scale was often in a woman's favor if she entered a maternity home (Welter 1966). On the opposite end of the spectrum, matrons also characterized sexually delinquent inmates as "saucy," which was a more acceptable way to call a woman provocative. The matrons used words such as "sick" or "diseased" to represent women with venereal diseases, and sometimes to describe pregnancy. The matrons' language suggests negative connotations to exemplify premarital sexual encounters.

Abandonment was the most frequent cause of admittance into maternity institutions. That is because, out of all the inmates, abandoned women received the most sympathy and the least criticism. Even after admittance, abandoned women received better treatment than those whom the matron believed had brought wretchedness upon themselves (Kunzel 1993). For that reason, many women claimed abandonment. All of the women who wished to enter a maternity home had to share their story with the matron. In some cases, the amount of sin associated with a potential inmate could compromise her acceptance into the institution. For example, the matron at Evansville's Home for the

Friendless rejected applicant Annie Woodson because Woodson had been involved with an African American man (Willard Library Archives, VCH 1870:34). The matron ended her logbook entry about Woodson with "But we could not take such a case. She seemed deranged." The type of sin that was deemed unacceptable depended on the individual matron, and no two institutions were alike in rules of acceptance. If a woman had been promised marriage, her having premarital sex was consequently deemed as slightly less sinful. Women were very unlikely to admit to willingly partaking in sex because the common idea about females was that sex was a tool for procreation or for seducing men into sin (Kunzel 1993:111). Victorian society treated pregnancy outside of marriage as if it were a sin and an incurable sexually transmitted disease that must be hidden from sight. Inmates essentially had to make the best out of a bad situation, considering that their reputations rarely rehabilitated after they became unmarried mothers.

Both physical and sexual abuse led girls and women to seek admittance into maternity homes. Courts saw a substantial number of abuse cases during the 19th century. By 1860, only two states had passed laws prohibiting wife beating, so protection of women from abuse was particularly limited. Historian Elizabeth Pleck (2004:8) added to her theory of the family ideal: "To Aristotle, the private sphere of women, children, and slaves was inferior to the *polis,* where men pursued the common good." This tied in to Victorian ideals, in which society encouraged women and children to remain silent regarding abuse in order to offer a false reality of harmony within the household. As a result, a young girl who confessed that her father had raped her was inherently sinful because she had broken an unwritten code of domestic privacy. A man could easily escape persecution of domestic crimes unless he murdered the woman, or women, involved. Incidentally, government officials did not prosecute any husbands for rape in the 19th century. Even in cases in which a non-husband raped a woman and was subsequently prosecuted, the law required the woman in question to refrain from speaking of her abuse. Victorian society clearly emphasized domestic privacy over effectively punishing domestic disputes, but women were not the only victims (Pleck 2004).

In addition to abuse, the majority of young girls entering maternity homes asked for admittance as a result of parental conflict. Soon after several states attempted to enforce laws against wife abuse in 1860, laws prohibiting child abuse began to appear. Efforts to stop wife abuse consequently halted, and focus shifted toward children. Child cruelty can be defined in many ways, including neglect, abandonment, and physical/sexual abuse. "Immoral" young girls in maternity homes were generally those whose parents had shamefully abandoned them once the girls had entered prostitution or similar degrading lifestyles (Pleck 2004). Rape and incest similarly led young girls to run away to maternity homes to escape their aggressors, though children who were victims of incest were automatically labeled as sexual delinquents because their innocence had been tainted. The cause of their loss of innocence was not taken into account, but their morality was seen as irreversibly infected (Gordon 1988). The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) spent considerable efforts on ending child abuse, and the answer that WCTU members offered as the cause of incest was low ages of consent. In 1885, the age of consent was between 10 and 12 years old, with the exception of

Delaware, where the age of consent was seven years old. Odem (1995:14–15) cited that in a petition to raise the age of consent, the WCTU advocated that "the age at which a girl can legally consent to her own ruin be raised to at least eighteen years." Sexual abuse disgraced each victim's purity, but the WTCU actively began pointing fingers at perpetrators of abuse as well.

Circumstances of sexual abuse in records are diverse in nature, but several themes are apparent. Being without a mother was the number-one factor leading to incest because the typical culprit of incest was the father. Fathers claimed they were drunk when they raped their daughters, or blamed their actions on needing female affection. Historian Linda Gordon included a case study in her book *Heroes of Their Own Lives* (1988:230) in which a man commits incest with four of his children, saying that "they were each going to be his wife for a week." When governing forces learned of situations similar to Gordon's anecdote, they removed children from the parental household and brought them to an appropriate institution, such as orphan asylums.

The Evansville Home for the Friendless welcomed children from abusive families because institutions specifically for children were not readily available in the Midwest until the early 20th century. Most of the abused inmates had run away from their homes, but a large number of the abused children had been brought to the home by the police. Kate Von Amlen arrived at the Home for the Friendless for the first time in 1870. The matron (Home log, WLA, VCH 1870:4) described her as "a German girl left at the age of 12 with a low unprincipled Father, by the death of her Mother. She was taken by her Father to a sporting house, and was ruined. … Had a child, and from exposure was very sick when found and brought to the Home." Von Amlen is an example of not only a young unmarried mother but also a victim of forced prostitution by the will of her father.

The Home for the Friendless quickly became a well-known refuge for girls and women in unfortunate circumstances. Granted, not all inmates came to maternity homes willingly. Although inmates could not escape the matron's disparagement, sexual victims fared better than those detained for willingly having sex. The antiprostitution movement was in full swing toward the end of the 19th century. Reformers were scouring red-light districts of cities to catch "immoral" women. Gordon (1988:244) argued that "prostitution was the most pervasive symbol of female sin" because not only were women becoming impure, they were doing so on purpose and independently earning their own wages. Prostitutes made up a large majority of the population of the maternity homes, especially in the Home for the Friendless. Young girls—especially those who had been cast out from society because they were victims of sexual abuse—congregated in red-light districts because they faced scrutiny elsewhere. In many cases, these girls ended up in brothels because they were not accepted elsewhere. The young "fallen angels" were predominantly the girls whom reformers hoped to "save" (Gordon 1988). According to a 19th-century social worker's hierarchy of sexual delinquency outlined by Kunzel (1993:56), the only people committing sexual delinquency worse than prostitution were the "homosexual perverts." Given the heightened stigma against selling one's body, prostitutes were certainly abundant in maternity homes.

One of the most prominent fixtures of Evansville's red-light district was Mollie Brown's House of Shame, which was a brothel named after its owner. Mollie Brown was the infamous Madame of Evansville, and her name rolled off the tongues of female reformers with bitter disgust. The most "vile" women in Evansville presumably went to or came from Mollie Brown's House of Shame, and they were equated to the peak of worthlessness. Police in Evansville started to arrest prostitutes and bring them to the Home for the Friendless, but many of them immediately ran away. One example is Jennie Jenkins (or Russell), who left for Mollie Brown's House of Shame only two days after her arrival (Home log, WLA, VCH 1870:17–20, 34). Prostitution was one of the few ways for a single woman to earn a living on her own, and in many situations of single motherhood, selling sex was the only option. Thus, these wayward women were connected by being cast out of morality. They created a separate sisterhood of women from the Christian sisterhood, and they worked together to make a living.

Considering that the majority of apprehended Evansville prostitutes immediately ran away, one must consider the role that the women's preferences played in their escapes. Why would women flee from a safe Christian house to return to a brothel if they did not prefer their lives prior to their arrests? The matron noted in the logbook that many of the inmates in the home at the time of Mollie Brown's death were devastated and inconsolable (Home log, WLA, VCH 1870:42). Perhaps prostitution was not a last resort but was the lesser of two evils in a time when one sexual encounter could brand a woman for the remainder of her life. Prostitutes were the primary target for reformers, but they were also the least successful cases in maternity homes.

Sexuality and gender roles are exposed in the female reformation effort during the Victorian age. Although many of the women in maternity homes were unmarried mothers, their stories are complex and subsequently deserve deeper analysis. The public's distaste for premarital sex and the unwed female's sexual appetite forced unmarried mothers to search for safe havens. Women who suffered from rape, incest, or abuse were taken in for protection, but their aggressors typically escaped persecution. Female criminals were not so lucky. Police hastily admitted them to institutions to prevent them from spreading their delinquency to women who still had their innocence. The Victorian public was consumed with upholding a positive female picture of motherhood and purity. Given the effort to hide abused and abandoned women from the public eye, one can observe the true struggle of misfortunate women in the 19th century.

Although the type of girls and women targeted by reformers had specific qualities, the women behind the 19th-century reform movement cannot easily be characterized. Similarly, the relationship between the inmates and female reformers is difficult to define. Nineteenth-century reform encompasses several different movements occurring often in combination with each other. Reformers are typically regarded for their interest in pursuing positive social change; nonetheless, their motivations behind helping women were not entirely sincere. In many respects, reformers sought to help "fallen women" out of a genuine effort to assist the misfortunate through spreading Christianity; however, the reformers' definition of misfortunate was what confused their definition of protection. Female reformers in the 19th century sought primarily to "cure"

impurity. Maternity homes and female reformers did not have an exclusively negative impact on women, but the motivations behind them need to be closely analyzed by historians. Irrespective of the situation leading a "fallen woman" to a maternity home, matrons and reformers labeled the fallen woman as guilty of her own victimization. Female reformers actively sought to transform society into a purer and more religious community, and the women who became inmates suffered the brunt of their efforts.

"Saving" women was just as imperative as "curing" them. Among female reform movements to control sexual impulses, female prison reform rose in an effort to save women, both religiously and physically, from penitentiaries. Female crime drastically increased during the Civil War. Estelle Freedman (1984) listed the three categories of crimes as against person, property, and public order. More often than not, female prisoners were serving time for moral or sexual crimes against public order, compared to their male counterparts serving time for serious crimes against person or property. Prison reformers acknowledged the terrible conditions of female inmates. Male wardens overcrowded female inmates into small cells where they suffered neglect and sexual abuse. Freedman (1984:16) stressed that "the sexual exploitation of inmates [in Indiana] was overt and systematic." To that point, the state prison in Indiana practiced an involuntary prostitution service for male guards at the expense of female prisoners that can be proven by prison logs and witness accounts. Prison reformers shared the moral code of other female reformers of the Victorian era, but they specifically sought to take women out from under the authority of men and turned to maternity homes to offer an effective alternative to imprisonment under the personal care of a matron; however, the safe havens created by female reformers often spawned a new form of danger for women by reinforcing sexual limitations of the female sex (Freedman 1984).

The key to understanding female reformers is to differentiate their actions versus their motivations. Reformers focused on preserving female chastity, but they did not ignore the importance of female safety. The Temperance Crusade beginning in the 1840s involved female activists acting to care for the abused "drunkard's wife." Famous reformers such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony opened their homes to abused women, similar to the open doors of maternity homes. Despite these efforts to help abused wives, the institution of marriage enveloped spouses in a dome of domesticity that protected men from the consequences of harming women. The 19th century rose in conservativism, and reformers aimed their efforts at sexual deviants, at the expense of abuse victims (Pleck 2004). In her article "The Cult of True Womanhood," Barbara Welter (1966) defined the common reformer's goal as defending female chastity; to defend that chastity, reformers had to control female contact with men. Men faced blame because they supposedly held the only power to take away a woman's virtue, leaving her irreversibly contaminated. For example, Regina Kunzel (1993:10) stated, "[A] prostitute [is] a victim of male lust forced to live a life of shame." A woman's virtue was seen as the most sacred thing worth defending, and female reformers sought to remove women from those who "infected" them (Welter 1966).

As the first matron of Evansville's Home for the Friendless, Johnson recorded accounts of women entering the home on account of male sin. Many inmates fled to

maternity homes from abusive men or as a result of abandonment. For example, Johnson recorded Lizzie Ruitz's story, in which Ruitz had already been abandoned with one man's child. She was then engaged to marry a different man and thus moved in with him and became pregnant. He promised to marry her but did not have the money to arrange a ceremony. He disappeared and married another woman with whom he had been secretly involved after taking Ruitz's money (Home log, WLA, VCH 1870:24). Although the matron's harsh criticism is evident in the logbook records, not all matrons were without sympathy for the situations in which women entered the home. Matrons did commiserate with women who suffered at the hands of men, if only by resenting any man who prematurely ruined perfect female innocence. Providing a safe place for women would, in theory, protect women from toxic men; however, protection was not provided only via physical shelter but also through religious caretaking.

The main goal of moral reform was to abolish prostitution and analogous sexual deviance, and reformers therefore targeted female delinquents (Melder 1967). Similar to how Eleanor Johnson scoured the red-light district of Evansville, searching for "desperate" women, female reformers sought out "fallen" women to cure them of their "wretchedness." Reformers' values are evident in the characteristics of women that they attempted to cure (Briggs 2000). The matron of the Evansville Home for the Friendless briefly mentioned Annie Keinwater's story, beginning, "A man wished to ruin her and secured the position of the proprietress of a fancy house to aid him. Succeeded in seducing her from the path of virtue, and in less than a year she was sunken into the lowest state, diseased in body and corrupted in soul" (Home log, WLA, VCH 1870:23). Reformers typically viewed inmates as sexual criminals because losing purity was a crime against God. The religious women spearheading reform and philanthropy wanted to cure fallen women, which suggested that the inmates were diseased to begin with. Reformers created labels to identify different types of "sexual delinquents"; these labels included, but were certainly not limited to, "diseased prostitutes," "unnatural women" (going against female nature), and "psychotic murderesses" (most often describing women who committed infanticide or crimes of passion). Matrons and reformers regarded these women as dangerous mostly because, as one label suggests, these women acted "unnaturally" (Ciani 1997). Consistent with the attitudes of the Victorian era, unnatural behavior for women was acting outside of traditional female gender roles. Women were expected to be pure and silent, and any actions otherwise were unwomanly. With that said, the "problem women" were those who committed sexual crimes (Ciani 1997). Similarly to others with Victorian values, the matrons of maternity homes usually regarded the inmates with harsh judgment in relation to their worth as women.

Religious philanthropic movement often overlapped with female reform in the 19th century. Reformers in both movements kept religious roots from their Revolutionary-era predecessors by giving back to the community and spreading Christianity to the less fortunate. In many instances, female philanthropists fulfilled their Christian duty by assisting misfortunate women, crossing paths with female reformers (Oates 1990). Maternity homes were predominantly Christian institutions, and the primary way in which matrons and reformers intended to aid misfortunate women was to

help them through Christian teachings. The Home for the Friendless required its inmates to attend sermons as well as Bible study regularly. Matrons claimed a direct connection between Christian teachings and the progress of inmates. The matron of the Home for the Friendless included a quote from a prostitute stating, "I never felt as I did in bible class today, I never had the truth come home to me as it did then. I feel I can stand a great deal better than I did before" (Home log, WLA, VCH 1870:35).

Religion played a substantial role in the motivations behind the opening of maternity institutions as well as the way in which matrons ran the homes; however, Christian values directly related to the reasons for which reformers judged inmates. Given that both religious philanthropists and reformers valued chastity, they correspondingly targeted eliminating premarital sexual activity. Welter's use of the word "sisterhood" is particularly relevant to the organizations of women spearheading reform. Connecting female reform with religious philanthropy, those involved in the "sisterhood" acted in an effort to "save" their unfortunate sisters; however, "salvation" was debatable. Given the fundamentally religious core of the movement, the women involved imposed their values onto fallen women. From Johnson's first logbook entry in June of 1870, she regarded inmates with a sense of hopelessness. Innocent victims of misfortune quickly were transformed into vile harlots by the end of the matron's descriptions. Johnson's very first logbook account harshly summarizes Jennie Pape's story:

> A very unprepossessing girl who came from the south
> about the close of the war. … Since her Father's death,
> when she was quite young her mother has kept lewd houses
> and has brought up her daughters to such a life. Jennie also
> drinks, sometimes to excess … had she been differently
> brought up might have been a true and worthy woman. ...
> She is now living a most wretched and degrading life with
> her Mother. (Home log, WLA, VCH 1870:1)

Stark judgment was a regular occurrence in the logbook entries. Johnson's next entry (1870:1) moves on to Alex Leuff: "A half sister of Jennie Pape. Thoroughly mistrusted in vice, and actually vile although only eight. Will become a desperate woman, if left to herself." One is left to wonder how much a person can mistrust an eight-year-old girl in vice. Johnson's judgment is noticeably severe because of her preconceived conclusions about the morality of non-Christian or "impure" women. The nature of Christian duty is left up for question, and the true implication of the "sisterhood of women" is also contentious.

"Sisterhood" seems to be a flexible term to comprise the spectrum of women meant to benefit from maternity homes. Although many female reformers, such as Johnson, took part in antislavery organizations in combination with female organizations, each matron possessed her own unique biases. For example, Kunzel cited the Salvation Army's women's social secretary in 1919 openly claiming that Salvation Army homes welcomed unmarried mothers "independent of creed or color, except where the national

prejudice prevents … in the South, we have had to confine our work entirely to the white girls" (1993:71). Racist remarks in logbook entries suggest that many maternity homes were racially homogenous (Home log, WLA, VCH 1870). Although Evansville's Home for the Friendless typically did not discriminate against inmates to the extent that similar institutions did, the matron could certainly be prone to racist tendencies. One matron explained the circumstances of Annie Woodson applying for entrance into the home in 1872: "[Annie] sank down and at length married a colored man. Lived happily with him till her friend interfered. … But we could not take such a case. She seemed deranged" (Home log, WLA, VCH 1870:34). The matron's voice reveals the true attitudes as well as discrimination toward the inmates, and this matron undoubtedly thought less of this woman's sanity because of her marriage to an African American man.

Female reformers were also wary of homosexuality. Lesbians encompassed everything "unnatural" about womanhood because they could not naturally reproduce. As a result, the fear of a lesbian epidemic spread through female reformers. In many cases, matrons would not allow dancing because of a connection to hell as well as a possible gateway activity to homosexuality (Kunzel 1993). By "controlling impulses," matrons could transform inmates into ideal women.

Reformers cannot be entirely commended, because their motivations negatively affected the inmates. Regardless of the lengths that reformers went to to assist women in need, they relentlessly blamed women for the crimes committed against them. Similarly to Johnson, most matrons did not have hope in their inmates and were simply fulfilling their Christian duty. Through hiding and silencing victims, reformers tried to erase the issue of female sexuality and to fool society into continuing to believe the myth of female purity. Sexual reputation was of utmost importance to society during the Victorian era, and reformers conformed to suppressing women rather than empowering them.

In her book *Breaking the Codes,* Ann-Louise Shapiro wrote, "The story of female criminality was a story about the pain of social change" (Ciani 1997:207). The women receiving recognition by historians for the numerous reform movements in the 19th century were the reformers, not the inmates, but the inmates, as opposed to those who acted in their favor, revealed a new side of Victorian society. Maternity homes certainly did not have purely positive consequences, and the inmates indisputably suffered in the name of reform. A question of justice is evident in the history of female reform in regard to fallen women. Although female reformers generally believed that they had the inmates' best interests at heart, the attitudes evident in their actions as well as written in logbooks divulge that perhaps reformers were also a group from which women needed protection. Maternity homes lay on the border between refuge and prison, and their matrons existed on a similar border between caretaker and warden. Through hiding fallen women from the watchful eye of society, matrons and reformers proposed a message about their opinion of the inmates. Female reformers instilled a clear idea that all unmarried sexually active women were guilty. The driving force behind female delinquency was directly related to the labels associated with them as well as to the criminalization of female sexuality. Consequently, treating fallen women as moral contagions encouraged sexual shaming, and society forced these women to face the

consequences of being sexually active regardless of whether that activity was consensual. The categorization of sexually active women as delinquents actively disgraced female sexuality, and female reformers effectively contributed to degrading women. Matrons contributed to sexual shaming, resulting in women either pursuing celibacy or, more commonly, lying about their sexual activity.

Perhaps the most important factor that was common among all inmates was lack of faith in their reformation due to inherent flaws in their characters. For example, Matron Johnson recorded included the case of Esther Middleton, who had been brought to the home as a result of prostitution:

> Took in as she had no shelter, her step father having closed
> his door against her. She had been in fancy houses, and was
> the most repulsive and worthless creature to be found.
> Remained many months, was given to falsehood and theft.
> Improved in general appearance, although the prospect of
> her ever being of any worth or character is very poor.
> (Home log, WLA, VCH 1870:5)

Johnson noticeably does not appear to have hope for Middleton. Matrons often looked down upon inmates as hopeless "feebleminded" sinners. Sexual interviews began the process of "curing," and, combining these with religious teachings, reformers used a scientific approach to investigation, as if they could cure the innate physical characteristics of impurity (Kunzel 1993). Reformers subsequently put a vast amount of effort into protecting young girls from becoming fallen.

Young girls suffered substantially through the Victorian era because of the criminalization of sex. Sexually active girls and women had already passed the point of no return with "reformation" once they had committed sexual acts (Odem 1995). Juvenile detention homes evolved as institutions similar to maternity homes, often as a halfway point between the streets and maternity homes. Juvenile institutions required pelvic exams upon entrance to determine whether the girls were virgins. According to a social worker from a juvenile institution in the 19th century, "The only hope is to remove [a young girl] entirely from influences that threaten destruction and to place her in an institution until the critical years are past" Odem (1995:114–15). Reformers consequently began to police girls before they had committed sexual crimes, or as a result of their being sexual abuse victims (Pleck 2004). Young girls could easily recognize that female sexuality was more offensive than male sex crimes, which led them to remain silent about sexual abuse as well as their own sexual histories. The reform movement thus evolved from sheltering abused women from society to sheltering society from sexually delinquent women. Subsequently, reformers enforced female injustice by shaming sexual acts, even those in which women were victims.

Inmates of maternity homes were often victims of rape and sexual abuse, but that made them guilty nonetheless. When a rape victim gave her sexual history to the matron, she had to explain if she had previously had consensual sex with a man. If she had, her

plea was taken less seriously because the matron could assume that the woman had seduced her aggressor into bed by the inescapable allure of her sexuality. For example, the matron of Evansville's Home for the Friendless wrote the sexual history of Carrie Thompson, summarizing that Thompson had had illicit sexual encounters with the brother of the man to whom she was engaged. Thompson came to the home because she was pregnant with the other man's twin children and to escape the stress of her situation. The matron permitted Thompson's entry into the home under the understanding that Thompson would give birth and then faithfully return to her fiancé. Soon after she left, Thompson requested admittance into the home for a second time because she was once again having an affair with the brother and needed a safe place. The matron refused Thompson's admittance the second time because she judged the woman's sin to be too great for reformation (Home log, WLA, VCH 1870:12).

The true victim in sexual crimes was chastity, for which women were simply vessels. The example of Eliza Leaker, an inmate of Evansville's Home for the Friendless, illustrates loss of purity even as a result of rape:

> A [G]erman girl of good character brought into trouble by
> being waylaid. He had confessed himself guilty of great
> wrong towards her, said he was intoxicated at the time, and
> that if any one should treat a sister as he had treated her, he
> would shoot him. She came to the home, remained a few
> weeks and went home. Finding some of the family
> unwilling to have her at home, she again asked admittance
> at the Home. Her child was born at the Home; for several
> months it was very feeble, afterward gained its health.
> (Home log, WLA, VCH 1870:9)

The common Victorian attitude advocated that if a woman could not sufficiently guard her chastity, then she must be punished, or rehabilitated at the very least (Odem 1995). Justice was unquestionably scarce regarding rape culture in the 19th century. A medical expert in sex abuse cases from the Victorian era claimed, "We seldom find cases of rape in healthy, robust girls in possession of their faculties and who are above the age of fourteen" (Gordon 1988:221). Subsequently, rape victims over the age of 14 were viewed as fundamentally corrupt because they had not been able to stop their assaults. Women undoubtedly felt the need to hide any sexual activity, even unwilling acts, because of the social stigmas regarding female sexuality. With the debilitating social stigmas regarding female sexuality, women unsurprisingly felt guilty about sexual activity, fostering negative connotations behind sexuality.

Although the reform movement focused primarily on prostitutes as the most disgraceful criminals, prostitution feasibly offered the most sexual freedom for women during the Victorian era (Odem 1995). Reformers policed red-light districts to punish prostitutes for their sins, though prostitution was one of the only ways in which a woman could earn her own wages in the 19th century. The matron of Evansville's Home for the

Friendless included a lengthy description of Maggie Harper's circumstances upon Harper requesting admittance into the home. The man who had promised to marry Harper had abandoned her and had stolen her money, leaving her desperate. She had immediately sought a job to pay for the survival of herself as well as her newborn child. After coming across brothel workers, she had been welcomed into the "fancy home" and had worked there for a short time to pay for food. Harper had faced difficulty finding work and so had pursued her only option (Home log, WLA, VCH 1870:17–19). Few female jobs were available at this point in history, and many women were in dire need of financial assistance. As a result, many of the women working in brothels used sex as a survival mechanism. Prostitutes did not have to rely on men to provide for them or their children, and in that sense, they were the most independent women of their time. The voices of Victorian society were going to condemn sexually active women for acting impurely regardless of the circumstances, so the degree of their criminality was somewhat arbitrary (Gordon 1988).

Similar to Molly Brown's House of Shame, brothels often became more genuine refuges than did maternity homes, if only because the women in them could escape from constant judgment. The matron's summary of Harper's sexual history mentions Harper's sense of family with the fancy-house prostitutes: They had welcomed and fed her without any judgment, and for that she was particularly grateful (Home log, WLA, VCH 1870:17–19). Instead of allowing themselves to be condemned as sexual criminals, prostitutes had the opportunity to use their sexuality for their own benefit. Granted, prostitution was not always a profession by choice, and while analyzing prostitution in the Victorian era, historians must pay close attention to the alternatives, given the circumstances of women.

Lack of justice for women in the Victorian era was pervasive in the treatment of sexual crimes. As a result of attempting to prosecute their aggressors, even if women won their cases, they lost the financial support of husbands. Women who pursued such action typically ended up in less appealing circumstances than if they had remained silent (Pleck 2004). A large proportion of inmates from Evansville's Home for the Friendless ran away from the institution, especially if they had been brought to the home as an alternative to prison. For example, the matron noted the case of Salli Garret, who originally entered the Home for the Friendless after being arrested for prostitution. After unwillingly staying at the home, Garret ran away to Mollie Brown's House of Shame (Home log, WLA, VCH 1870:36). Garret's story was certainly not the only instance in which an inmate escaped or became dissatisfied with the institution. The logbook entries prove not only that the matron shamed women for sexuality but also, and more importantly, that her tactics were, more often than not, ineffective.

Reformers were supposed to instill hope and strength into women of the 19th century, but instead, they primarily sought to encourage a conservative, shameful society. Victimization is a common theme in all aspects of the argument regarding female sexuality and morality. In contrast to their antecessors who attempted to prevent male mistreatment of women, Victorian female reformers acted in an effort to "cure" women once the damage had been done. Victorian female reformers viewed women as victims of

male lust and further sought to prevent the loss of purity rather than to protect women. Nineteenth-century reformers fell short in their efforts to assist women, and women continued to fall victim to a lack of justice, but the overarching theme of victimization through this research is that women were victims of sexual shaming.

The patterns of sexual shaming evident in the history of the Home for the Friendless are not specific to Victorian America. An emphasis on purity has been a focus of modern major religions and has therefore been commonplace in society. The obsession with female purity in Victorian America had indisputably religious roots. Although the definitions of purity have changed over time, movements have not ceased to police the protection of wholesomeness. Modern America does not have maternity homes as a tangible institution, but sexual shaming still undoubtedly exists. Women must constantly defend themselves regarding their sexual activity, even if that activity is forced upon them. These are issues that we must still battle with, and looking at examples of how women suffered through being "cleansed of their sins" can underline the severity of shaming. American society is still grappling with issues of justice in feminism. Female victims of rape still face blame for their situation based on their clothing or their appearance. Society today often makes the same mistake that the reformers did in overemphasizing the loss of purity as a result of a sexual crime instead of focusing on and punishing the perpetrators. Misplaced judgment ultimately hinders women from progressing in feminist history. As long as people continue to blame women for their sexuality, social stigmas will delay women from progressing as a gender.

The use of logbook records is crucial to the understanding of the effects of maternity homes. The inmates' voices are not heard directly, but their stories are told in such a way that the details are credible. Future historians can follow a similar analysis of history to allow more voices to come to the surface. Primary sources such as the logbook records of Evansville's Home for the Friendless must be scrutinized in terms of the voice of the reader. Historians cannot continue to treat primary sources regarding women solely as proof of female oppression. To assert the strife of women as having only one cause is to dramatically undervalue the power of women over women. Men did not control women's history, and their roles in women's lives should not dominate women's studies. Historians must consider multiple dimensions and levels of power in society in order to construct a more complete picture of the past.

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