A Thesis

Entitled

Victorian Governesses:
A Look at Education and Professionalization

By

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Dedication

To my parents and my sister,

and

Steve
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Introduction: Seeking Employment

The Only Career for Women

Histories and fictions explore the lives of Victorian governesses. The governess appeared lonely, depressed, and unwanted, yet thousands of women entered the profession. Victorian governesses experienced changing social and economic conditions. As a whole, their breeding and education defined them as ladies, however, their existence placed them in sharp contrast to the social respectable expectations of womanhood. Despite governesses’ precarious social identity, Victorians discovered that few managed to live and maintain the social ideal. The term, a lady, defined a woman of the middle-class who attempted to mimic, “the characteristics traditionally associated with high social standing” or a “refined and genteel woman,” of Ladies, titled women of the aristocracy.¹ A lady also represented a woman who had authority over others and was used as a formal address to a woman of a higher social status than the speaker. The defined roles of women of the middle-classes failed to encompass or make allowance for the realities of life for women in Victorian society. The Victorian ideal of womanhood cast woman as an entity, property of her husband and she functioned under economic

¹ Oxford English Dictionary. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989-), http://0-dictionary.oed.com.carlson.utoledo.edu/entrance.dtl (accessed March 3, 2009); “Female Education in the Middle Classes.” The English Woman’s Journal 1, no. 2 (1858):224. This author defined the difference between a Lady and a lady as “like the lady of rank (Lady), she is above engaging in industrial pursuits; and she even pities the lot of her sex laboring ranks, that women must share in these the lot of man; but she forgets that for woman to find happiness in a life of ease, it is requisite that man in the same rank be equally exempts from toil. Unlike the lady of rank, the lady of the middle class is left alone during the day. Her husband, her suitor, her brother, her friend – in place of accompanying her in her visits, or in her other efforts to occupy a day of leisure, is busy at his desk, engrossed in his industrial avocations.”
dependency, which gave men the power to control her property and money upon marriage. This left little room for a female to be an individual. As a result of this dependency “women established the home as their ‘sphere,’” claiming moral authority over religious and sexual matters” between 1800 and 1840.2 Throughout the nineteenth century the social entity of womanhood was reinvented. During the middle part of the century a Victorian lady was taught accomplishments and manners, but by the end of the century the feminist movement demanded more opportunities for middle-class women and strove to replace the dependent woman with an educated independent woman.3

Two major debates existed during the nineteenth century that addressed the issues facing middle-class women. The first dealt with the movement for better, more structured, and higher education for females. Women aimed for the advancement of their education by starting their own schools, petitioning universities and colleges to allow females to take their entrance exams and open their classes to include students from both sexes. The second centered on the social definition of womanhood. Within this debate, governesses dealt with the controversies of middle-class women working outside of the home. The definition of womanhood placed the responsibility for the maintenance of women on the men in her family, her father, brother, or husband. So women working outside the home placed her social status and the status of her family in question. However, as more women entered the work force as governesses there developed a quest

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3 Ibid., 5.; Joan Burstyn, Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1980), 101-102. Murray commented that “upper-class and upper-middle class women made their own sphere of influence in “society,” orchestrating the elegant dining-room and drawing-room life in which powerful connections were made.”
to bring professional status to their work. These debates intertwined and advancements made in one, often helped the struggle of the other.

Victorian governesses found themselves central to the debate of ideal womanhood because of their roles as educators and workers. Governesses and others concerned with the conditions of governesses endeavored to professionalize that career by embracing and taking part in the movement for higher female education and the advancement of women in other fields of work. The increase of print media allowed governesses and others to develop conversations and share ideas about what a successful classroom should look like and how it should be run, in addition to the level of education and subject matter successful governesses needed. While print media provides the best glimpse into governesses’ professionalization movements, the organizations founded to support governesses also expands this understanding.

Governesses, women mainly of the middle-classes, needed to work to earn a living. Their parents or other family members failed to leave, or could not leave, a living for these women. Since Victorians saw teaching as an acceptable position for ladies, because it was an extension of the women’s sphere, ladies technically maintained their social rank, even after being hired to work. In fact, most were hired due to their social rank. Governesses also required an education, in order to teach their pupils. During the Victorian era the demand for quality female education, an education that included math and science, increased. With this movement governesses sought to improve their personal education, that way they achieved maximum employability on the tight job market. In addition to gaining a higher education, many governesses worked to achieve professionalization for their vocation. Governesses and their supporters justified
professionalization based on the educational qualifications they received from lectures series and women’s colleges. Women used this ideal women theory to help gain a footing in higher education. They acknowledge that one of their defined roles was to help educate the next generation of Britons, and how could they successfully achieve this expectation without an education themselves, they asked.

Women, including governesses, used journals, books, and organizations designed for women to begin to build a network for information and debate. During the nineteenth century many ladies’ journals and books were printed for governesses, schoolmistresses, and educators. Governesses, other teachers, and concerned parents used these literary communities to share educational practices and lessons, develop professional organizations and standards for qualifications, and to debate the changing landscape of education reform in Victorian England. Several of these works provided everything from general advice, given by other governesses, mothers, and even some men, to exact lessons, craft templates, and lists of books to aid children’s education.

The Governesses’ Benevolent Institution, founded in 1843 helped educate governesses in and around London, and provided aid to governesses out of work or old and retiring. Through these communities governesses desired to reduce their isolation, advance their profession, and acquire new educational techniques to help teach the children entrusted to their care. Governesses also worked to gain professional status by advancing their personal education, by bettering their lessons, and by challenging the place of women in Victorian society. The journals, magazines, books, and schoolroom textbooks provide a glimpse into the development of female education and education provided by females. Within the women’s debates, governesses represented one of the
first accepted professions for women; they revealed a need for and provided better education for girls, and their profession faltered as a result of Parliamentary interest and action in the development of a public school system.

Before undertaking the examination how governesses functioned within, adapted to, and aided the women’s movements, an understanding of the Victorian concept of the ideal woman must be reached. For the middle-classes, this ideal represented the model for life. Two separate spheres existed during this period, one public, for men, and one private, for women. “According to the ideal, home became a place where only women – mistresses of the household, servants, and daughters – spent their lives.”\(^4\) Within this ideal the position of governess left these women somewhere in the mucky middle. Again they retained their social rank as a lady, yet they earned wages, between the amounts of £15 to £100 went against the desired leisured definition of middle-class womanhood.

During the early years of the nineteenth century, the upper and middle classes embraced this ideal. Women’s magazines abandoned articles about political affairs and focused on “moral tales, poetry, and advice on etiquette.”\(^5\) Men of the middle-classes achieved success when their wives and daughters stopped producing goods and only consumed. However, by the 1860s, some amongst the middle-classes began to question the ideal. Based on the definition of the ideal womanhood, the work performed by governesses removed them from their social class. However, “rather than being simply victims of the Victorian ideal of femininity, governesses helped to forge, perpetuate, and even challenge conventional understandings of what middle-class women could profitably learn, know,

\(^4\) Burstyn, 30.

\(^5\) Ibid., 34.
and teach.” The success of governesses’ pupils, both male and female, helped to shed light on the capabilities of women as their teachers. Through the process of slow recognition to the idea, some Britons accepted the concept that women of the middle-classes needed to work. “Most of those who came to accept the concept… retained their belief in separate spheres, but came to accept the need for women to professionalise their own sphere.” Women laid the foundation for movement into the public sphere and earned respect for their professions by working within their society’s construction. By not outwardly challenging all aspects of Victorian society and demanding change in one large step, women gained ground by demanding small changes. Governesses helped this foundation, simply because teaching was one of the first acceptable wage earning positions for middle-class women. Their position reflected the idea that women can work and still be considered ladies.

A debate is currently taking place among historical scholars about what governesses knew and taught. Several historians over many decades tackled questions and examined sources concerning governesses. Much of the debate stems from the fact that governesses were women and they were poor, so their papers, letters, and other historical records have been destroyed by previous generations. A few memoirs exist and several Victorian novels concerning governesses, and even written by governesses speak to their experiences. The families that hired governesses sometimes left records of their thoughts and feelings about their governesses, but these sources provide little insight to governesses’ knowledge. Lastly, the journals, books, and textbooks, mentioned above provide some of the best insight to the classrooms governesses ran.

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7 Burstyn, 21.
While scholars agree on certain points, they diverge on others. One of the major discussions concerns how well governesses were equipped to teach and what kind of education they provided. While scholars take positions on one side of the debate or the other, governesses provided solid educations by running successful classrooms or governesses knew little and taught little, both sides quickly point out that since there was no uniform education system in Britain during this period, placing a standard to measure governesses by remains mostly impossible. The observation of the successes and achievement pupils of governesses can help illuminate some clues regarding the governesses’ success in the passing on of knowledge.

Some historians, for example, M. Jeanne Peterson and Carol Dyhouse found that while governesses and females failed to acquire the same education as their male counterparts, governesses provided their female charges with a solid educational foundation. Peterson in her work *Family, Love, and Work in the Lives of Victorian Gentlewomen*, acknowledges the haphazard education Victorian females received, however, she points out that females enjoyed a greater degree of diversity in their options of home study, because they could focus on what interested them. In her study, Peterson concluded that women “studied widely, often deeply, and their education, although usually not formal, institutional, and tidy, was rich and strong.”8 Peterson, like Dyhouse, in her study, *Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*, showed that the families’ interest in the education of their children reaped greater intellectual rewards. Dyhouse discovered that the children of parents who took an active role in the choosing of a governess and an interest in what their children learned gained a better education.

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than unengaged parents. Both scholars concluded that while some governesses failed, the role played by the parents, support or indifference, impacted a female’s education just as greatly.

Joyce Senders Pedersen and Joan Perkin found governesses educational and economic background limited and therefore unable to provide other Victorian females with an education of great consequence. Perkin, in her description of governesses used accounts from pupils that portrayed their governesses as tyrants and ignorant in most subjects. Yet, Perkin also acknowledges that children spent long hours in study, often starting around 7am.9 Joyce Sender Pedersen defined two different types of Victorian teachers. Private schoolmistresses, she defined as women who ran private schools and governesses, and public schoolmistresses, those who taught in public schools and those open to public scrutiny. Pedersen argues that public school teachers moved toward professionalization, while private schoolmistresses “aspired to a leisureed, amateur role in a secluded, quasi-domestic setting.”10 Throughout her article, Pedersen asserts that due to the fact that governesses come from the gentle leisureed class; they want nothing but a leisureed lifestyle. Women who lived leisureed lifestyles remained firmly in the sphere of the home, and these women were not required to do any of the household chores, such as cooking or cleaning, and they spent their days visiting or entertaining friends, and possibly shopping or walking in the park. While many women took positions as governesses to maintain their social rank, most did not live leisureed lives, and historical records exist to counter Pedersen’s claim. One of the missing links in Pedersen’s study is

the difference in education in the middle-classes and aristocracy compared with the education of the lower classes, which will be discussed in chapter one.

Regardless of their overall analysis and conclusion about governesses, scholars use a variety of sources to help explain and support their arguments. Although primary sources do exist, some scholars such as Kathryn Hughes, Cecilia Lecaros, and Wanda Neff, rely heavily on fictional sources to illustrate their points. Fictional sources, especially Jane Eyre because Charlotte Bronte once served as a governess, provide insight into the lives of governesses. Using fiction aids any historical examination, so long as it does not overpower the primary sources. An anonymous governess, in 1858, wrote an article in *The English Woman’s Journal* and on this subject she wrote,

> I confess, first, that in all my course of reading, I have not met with any relation of a governess’s life that bears the slightest resemblance to my own experience. Secondly, that in those I have perused, the heroine was always beautiful or graceful, and the facts, very romantic; whereas, I am very common-place in face and figure.\(^{11}\)

In some cases fictional representations of governesses and historical representations become intertwined making it difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction. Outside of the few studies dedicated solely to governesses and the small biographical studies of a few more famous governesses, some scholars, such as Lee Holocombe and Janet Horowitz Murray, include the lives of governesses in their studies Victorian education, women’s movements, and women’s labor.

Time, the advance of technology, and the mindset of the English impacted the profession of governessing. Chapter one contains a brief exploration of the role and status of governesses since the twelfth century, in order to chart how governesses came to be in the nineteenth century. The goal of this section is to show the fluid and adaptive nature of

\(^{11}\)“Going a Governessing.” *The English Woman’s Journal*. 1, no. 6 (1858): 396.
the profession, as a result this can help provide a base of understanding to explain why many governesses and their employers embraced the changes of the Victorian period. The second section of this chapter deals with the changing economic conditions in England during the nineteenth century and the educational reforms embarked upon by Parliament. The economic prosperity and expanding world market impacted the number of governesses and hiring of them. The reforms in education ultimately led to the need for governesses to acquire and teach a larger variety of subjects, including botany, geography, math, and history. Chapter two explores the shifting landscape of female education in Britain during the Victorian period. The demand for the superior quality education of boys before they began public schooling placed a greater need on governesses to improve their own education, in order to pass it on to their pupils. At the same time advocates for the advancement of female education demanded that governesses and girls receive a wider range of knowledge. As a result of governesses obtaining a higher quality education, their status as teachers improved and moved toward full professionalization of the industry.

The third chapter explores the ways in which governesses used the resources available to them to continue moving toward professionalization. As the demand for better education increased governesses, teachers, and others interested in the cause created organizations, associations, and societies to help governesses move toward greater professionalization. Mass media helped provide resources and links to other governesses and sympathetic organizations. By entering a governess’s schoolroom, the application of the advice found in mass media can be seen. With improvements in education and an increasing number of pedagogic theories about teaching, this section
explores the different kinds of advice, techniques, and methods on the market, and how governesses obtained and used this information to improve their schoolrooms. Victorians founded institutions and schools to help provide higher education and certification to governesses and teachers. The fourth chapter takes a closer look at the process and affects of professionalization. This chapter also explores the opposition to governesses professionalizing in the nineteenth century and the debate created in historical scholarship.

Finally, the conclusion attempts to tie up the connections between the professionalization of governesses with the women’s employment movement, the demand for higher education for women, and the changing definition of womanhood due to the industrialization of Britain. Governesses played a unique role during the nineteenth century because not only did they have the education of a lady, at the most basic level, but the most successful governesses acquired a deep well-rounded education. In addition, governessing was the first acceptable wage earning profession for ladies of the middle-classes, and lastly, the mass number of women claiming to be governesses highlighted the economic necessity to find employment opportunities for women in other fields.
Chapter One: Organizing the Schoolroom

Brief History of Governesses – “Of these merely conventional relations, one of the most artificial, the most anomalous, is the existence of a class of women whom we style private governesses; women employed to give such home training and instruction as are necessary to our children, and fulfill the highest of these duties which, is a simpler state of society, devolve on parents.” – Anna Jameson, 1846.

Throughout the history of female education, the English governess witnessed changes in her position in society, her appearance, and the stereotypes surrounding her profession. The sad and lonely governess with her thread-bare dark colored clothes of the nineteenth century fails to reflect the status of governesses during previous eras. By exploring the sources left by families, governesses, and pupils, aspects of governesses’ lives come to light. The sources provided by the children often fail to appear before the student has reached adolescence or adulthood and the sources reflect their memories of their governesses. The history of governesses sheds light on other issues, for example, female education, the composition of society, and the development of teaching as a profession. The goal of professionalization was to place governesses’ work on the same level as men who held positions as lawyers, architecture, doctors, and professors.

One of the most successful governesses of the twelfth century was Catherine Swynford. She served as a governess to the children of the Duke of Lancaster. One of the major differences between Catherine and the Victorian governess related to Catherine’s marital status. Catherine was married, unlike the Victorians who required governesses resign their positions, once married. Catherine also came from the aristocratic class and
she held the title of dame. The daughters of earls and baronets typically represented the social position of most of the governesses. Catherine’s position demanded that she manage every aspect of her pupils’ lives. Several years after the death of her husband, Catherine married the Duke of Lancaster, his third marriage. This marriage made Catherine a duchess and wife to a member of the royal family. The gulf between governesses of the twelfth century and the nineteenth was created by more than just time. Victorians feared the governess may wish to rise in social standing by marriage to a son of the family that employed her.\textsuperscript{12} Relationships between family members and governesses reflected poorly on the governesses, however illicit relationships and marriages did occur.

In the sixteenth century, Katherine Ashley began serving Princess Elizabeth Tudor. The princess was only three years old when Katherine joined her household. Katherine remained with Elizabeth throughout her life. Similarly to Catherine Swynford, Katherine Ashley came from a titled family and she remained with Princess Elizabeth even after her marriage. Katherine continued serve as a servant and companion to Elizabeth after she ascended the throne. Katherine stayed in this position until she passed away.\textsuperscript{13} During these years governesses served not only as educators but also as trusted friends.

In the seventeenth century, women sought to teach professionally. However, the golden age for women’s learning, which as inspired by Queen Elizabeth I faded as the seventeenth century progressed. Women seeking to enter the profession of education as teachers or governesses met with severe criticism and only a minority group of reformers

\textsuperscript{12} Bea Howe, \textit{A Galaxy of Governesses} (London: Derek Verschoyle, 1954), 19-25.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 25-31.
“supported the theory of having a nucleus of properly paid and trained governesses.”\textsuperscript{14} As a result, many well-born girls could barely read or write. However, some families hired governesses to provide a solid education for their daughters. King Charles I hired the Bathsua Makin, a woman of great learning, to be the governess to his daughter Princess Elizabeth Stewart. Princess Elizabeth, by the age of nine, learned to read, write, and speak, in some capacity, in five languages. Governesses served as respected members of the household and Bathsua received a pension for her service after the death of Princess Elizabeth. The theme of daughters receiving their education based on their parents’ interests in intellectual pursuits continued into the nineteenth century.

In the eighteenth century it “was considered bad manners to be rude to the governess.”\textsuperscript{15} Governesses represented valued members of the household. Often governesses came from the poorer branches of a family and served the children of the wealthier branches. Within the eighteenth century a major shift in the role and position of governess occurred. Prior to the nineteenth century only wealthy and titled families required governesses for their daughters. In addition, governesses came from titled families. At the end of the eighteenth century, governesses began to appear in the homes of those of the middle-classes. It was in the eighteenth century that governesses not only provided education and social instruction, but they also safeguarded the virgin innocence of their female students. The development of a separate schoolroom appeared during this century, as well. Prior to this the children’s living space and the schoolroom were often located in the same room of the house. Even though governesses existed long before, the

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 36.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 55.
room occupied by the governess and her charges was simply the nursery.\textsuperscript{16} By the
nineteenth century, any family wealthy enough provided space for a schoolroom in one of
the upper stories of the house. Despite the changes that took place in the eighteenth
century, the governesses of the nineteenth century witnessed significant alternations to
their profession.

Before the Victorian period, few women were either inclined or few were
educated to be governesses. Women obtained no training in the arts of teaching.
However, as Britain industrialized and urbanized more families sought the services of
governesses and more women entered the work. In the beginning of the nineteenth
century, the status and role of the teacher and governess underwent a profound change.
The respectable treatment of governesses decreased rapidly as the century progressed.
Governesses functioned as something in between a lady and a wage earner and a member
of the household and a servant. As an increasing number of middle-class women sought
positions a governesses, they created a class of working women who did not come from
the lowest ranks of society, but rather the middle-classes. Mrs. Jameson, a governess
before her marriage, noted that governesses created an enlarging class of women. With
their numbers on the rise, the pay rate for governesses decreased drastically. Competition
for positions had some governesses seeking for ways to enhance their employability.
Families hired governesses for as little as thirty pounds or less annually. Lady Elizabeth
Eastlake, in 1848, defined the ladies and their position as a governess in Quarterly
Review:

The real definition of a governess, in the English sense, is a being who
is our equal in birth, manners, and education, but our inferior in worldly
wealth. Take a lady, in every meaning of the word, born, and bred, and let

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 53-54.
her father pass through the *Gazette*, and she wants nothing more to suit our highest *beau ideal* of a guide and instructress to our children. We need the imprudencies, extravagancies, mistakes, or crimes of a certain number of fathers to sow that seed from which we reap the harvest of governesses. There is no other class which so cruelly requires its members to be, in birth, mind, and manners, above their stations, in order to fit them for their station.17

A governess still needed to be a lady and understand the social etiquette well-bred girls needed to function in society, but their positions lost the respect they once held.

Governesses worked since the mid-decades of this century to regain respect through professionalization. The history of education, women, and society always impacted the profession of governesses. The Victorians experienced social movements and demands for change from all these aspects of life. For example, within the history of education a shift occurred between home or religious based education to state regulated education. Liberal periodicals, such as, the *Edinburgh Review* and *Westminster Review* “called for the inclusion of modern studies, languages, geography mathematics, chronology, and experimental philosophy.”15 Due to the objections based on schools’ curriculum, many parents decided to educate their children at home. Criticisms of the education system, eventually led to Parliamentary involvement. The government commissioned several studies, like the Charity Commission Report of 1819. The first grant for education was awarded in 1883.19 Government involvement allowed for the enforcement of standards and provided educational oversight. The participation of government strongly impacted the role governesses played in British society. Government reform of the education

19 Ibid., 629.
system eventually undermined the advancements in professionalization governesses made.

Amongst all the changes happening to the governess’s position throughout the centuries, the term governess did not always refer to an educator. At first, the term governess “did not necessarily imply a teacher, but could simply mean one who was responsible for the well-being of children usually those of a royal or noble household, and for directing their education.”

By the nineteenth century the term governess usually denoted a private teacher who educated pupils in a family’s home. However, before the 1870s, the term schoolmistress functioned interchangeably with the term governess. The distinction occurred between women who taught elementary school and ladies who educated children in their own homes or in private schools. Elementary schools were designed for and catered to lower-class children.

Primarily, governesses educated the girls of upper middle-class families until the First World War. As more public schools opened that hired female teachers, the history of the governess and the teacher diverged. Even into the 1930s “teachers at the Mrs. Fife’s famous finishing school in Cambridge were still referred to as ‘the governesses’.”

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the role of the nurse maid and governess molded together to form the figure of the nanny. For the purpose of this study, the term governess will be used to refer to day governesses, private governesses, and teachers who ran small private schools. The connection between governesses and

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21 Ibid., 7.
22 Day governesses traveled from home to home to educate multiple families’ children during the day. A private governess lived in her pupil’s home full time. And teachers of small boarding schools accepted about seven to ten girls.
teachers or schoolmistresses who ran small private boarding and day schools was the 
sources and materials they had available to them in order to create their lessons. Both 
private governesses and teachers in private schools provided education for aristocratic 
and middle-class families. Also most women seeking positions as governesses, during the 
Victorian period, took positions in private homes or schools without great preference. 
The main goal of governesses during the job search was simply to find any position that 
paid enough to survive on.

**Economics and Education** – *We gain nothing by shrinking from the truth; a governess is 
a dependent, and subject to the master and mistress of the house: she is engaged for 
higher employments, and requires a higher salary, than persons devoted to manual labor, 
because endowments of the mind must be purchased at a higher rate.*” 
Advice to Governess – 1827

In the Victorian era, the participants in government gained an interest in the 
education of their constituents’ children. In August 1833, J.A. Roebuck managed to push 
his education reform bill through the House of Commons. The Education Bill of 1833 
funded a grant for £20,000 for the erection of school houses and education of children of 
the poorer classes.\(^23\) In 1840, reform came to grammar schools though the Grammar 
School Act, which allowed “governors to introduce subjects other than those provided for 
in the foundation” documents.\(^24\) After these early acts, a second wave of commissioned 
reports was requested by Parliament. The 1860s saw the Report of the Newcastle 
Commission, the Report of the Clarendon Commission, the Report of the Argyll 
Commission and the Report of the Taunton Commission. Several acts passed through 
Parliament after the publication of these reports. The Elementary Education Acts of 1870

\(^24\) Ibid., 126.
established a national system of elementary education in England. Compulsory elementary education for children between the age of 5 and 10 was enacted by Parliament in 1880. Elementary education became free in 1891. The age span for children attending increased in 1893 to include eleven year olds and rose again in 1899 to include all children to the age of twelve.\textsuperscript{25} Even with the Elementary Education Act, secondary education remained in the hands of parents. Secondary education referred to children between the ages of eleven and nineteen. Parents sent their children to private schools for secondary education. The problem arose that no standards existed to ensure the effectiveness of the schoolmaster or schoolmistress.\textsuperscript{26} Little to no oversight existed to patrol private institutions during the first half of the century. Private schools popped up all over Britain, catering to different social classes. As a result of the changes in education, women often started their own private schools with their mothers, sisters, or cousins, instead of hunting for positions as private governesses. These private schools came and went based on the financial need of the women who ran them. Some women, such as Ellen “Nelly” Weeton Stock, a governess from 1809-1814, worked with her mother to run a small school, in Upholland. After her mother died, Weeton turned to her bother for support. However, this arrangement failed to last when Weeton’s brother took a bride, so Weeton returned to teaching, this time as a private governess.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{25} Colin Matthew, ed. \textit{Short Oxford History of the British Isles: The Nineteenth Century} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 115, 129.; Burstyn, \textit{Victorian Education}, 16. “By the time of the 1870 Education Act the larger school had become the norm for educating both boys and girls of the lower classes, and an intricate machinery for preparing teachers, inspecting schools, and administering government aid had been established.”


\textsuperscript{27} Ruth Brandon, \textit{Governess: The Lives and Times of the Real Jane Eyres} (New York: Walker & Company, 2008), 148-184. Nelly Weeton Stock obtained the Stock name after her marriage and last governessing position. So while she was a governess she was Nelly Weeton.
The private school versus private home education offered a new challenge to parents. Middle-class parents feared the social mixing of students because they believed their children would befriend or pick up the habits of children who came from families with less income. The rising wealth and class mobility required parents to ensure their children received an education based on their new station in life. Victorian parents faced a vast array of options, from public schools and private institutions of varying sizes and social make-up, to private governesses and tutors when deciding how to educate their children, of both sexes. This caused Victorian education, for both the sexes, to seem “disordered when compared with the regimentation of the twentieth-century school.”

The movement to regularize and standardize boys’ education throughout the era was in part response to challenges of students faced on universities’ entrance exams. Increasingly, Victorians saw education as a way to advance in society and as a result, more parents desired collegiate education for their sons. Ideas about making changes to female education, also inspired parents to pay greater attention to the education their daughters received.

The changes in the economic landscape of Great Britain, from industrialization to the ever growing world-market, contributed to the changing perceptions of education. The economic conditions of the nineteenth century also impacted middle-class women’s need for work and the market of available work for women governessing. The Victorian era saw an increase in the number of governesses seeking employment. The census of 1851 and of 1911 provided a basic understanding of the populous to explain to Victorians where the rising numbers of governesses during this period came from. Several articles in women’s journals, like The English Woman’s Journal, addressed concerns related the

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figures and statistics of the 1851 Census. Victorian women used the 1851 Census to help support their causes and to address social, political, and economic issues facing women. The plight of governesses was one of those issues. Prior to 1841, roughly 30,000 women occupied a position in education, either as a private governess or in private schools. By the 1851 Census, 67,551 women recorded their occupation as teacher. As seen above, Parliament only enacted a national elementary education system in 1870, so the women occupied as teachers in the 1851 Census worked predominately as governesses, in private schools, or in schools run by churches or religious groups.

One of the other startling issues Victorians discovered from the census again concerned women. The census revealed that England contained half a million more women than men. With half a million deficit of men, women needed to seek another occupation outside the only socially expected position of wife.

The chief reason given to explain this surplus of middle-class women was the excessive emigration of men of their class, who were responding to calls of far flung empire and seeking new lives in new worlds. As a member of the Army or Navy stationed abroad, a civil servant, a trader, a colonist, the middle-class English male was ‘anywhere, and everywhere except where he ought to be, making love to the pretty girls in England.’

29 Matthew, History of the British Isles, 172. The census started recording women’s occupations only ten years earlier in 1841. “Female Education,” 222. “In 1851 there were in Great Britain in all 5,998,384 women of an age above twenty; that is, about six millions, of these, there are returned as – Engaged in independent industry, or possessed of independent mean …… 2, 153, 924 Wives and daughter (above 20) of farmers, innkeepers, shopkeepers, shoemakers, etc., Specially returned as such…………………………………………………………459,115 Wives, widows, and daughters returned as of no occupation …………………3,227,153 Paupers, etc……………………………………………………………………………158,192” Christina de Bellaigue, “The Development of Teaching as a Profession for Women before 1870,” The Historical Journal 44, no. 4 (Dec., 2001): 963.; Joan Perkin, Victorian Women (Washington Square, New York: New York University Press, 1993), 35.


Men not only emigrated across the world, but many of those remaining in England waited until their thirties before getting married. Yet, during this period girls married between the years of their late teens and early twenties. With half a million extra women, the societal ideology of women’s role in life, to marry and produce children, was seriously undermined. Parents slowly realized that their daughters needed additional skills, knowledge, and accomplishments to attract potential suitors. If girls failed on the marriage market, they required an education that trained them to earn their own livings as clerks, sales agents in retail, or nurses. As a result of the 1851 Census discussions of female education and labor swept across Great Britain.

Most women, who turned to educating children as governesses, during this period, came from upper and middle-class families and served in aristocratic and upper middle-class homes. Girls from lower middle-class families also found positions as governesses in some middle-class homes. However, they most likely failed to display enough social etiquette to acquire a position in a good household. Many governesses were spinsters, orphans, or widows seeking employment out of financial necessity, rather than a desire to teach. “It was estimated that only 6 or 7 percent of all middle-class women teachers had consciously chosen teaching as their careers.” Despite the lack of desire to teach by many educators, the concept of women educators as a professional career, as was seen in the seventeenth century, saw a revival. This time, though not without setbacks and terminology changes, women achieved professional status.

Entering a position as a governess represented the only way for middle-class women to earn a living, while maintaining their status as a genteel lady. Due to the vast numbers of governesses on the market, families often hired governesses, overworked

32 Ibid., 12.
them and then paid them shockingly low wages. Governesses and the families that hired them began to question the quality of the education governesses received in their childhood and the quality of education governesses provided. Joan Perkin, in her study, *Victorian Women*, found that most governesses “were as ignorant as their pupils.” Part of this problem related to the number of women flooding into the profession, as few other employment opportunities existed for them. With the growing number of women seeking governess positions the quality of the education provided decreased.

Due to a lack of Parliamentary interest in education for most of the nineteenth century, no qualifications or academic achievements restricted what governesses taught or failed to teach. Especially when it came to the education of females, no entrance exams existed for them prior to the mid to late Victorian era, for the quality of girls’ education to be judged. The pathetic educational backgrounds of many governesses illuminated the overarching problems in female education. Yet, despite this fact, Carol Dyhouse, believed “it is worth remembering that countless girls received a reasonable sound early education” under the tutelage of a governess. Governesses often succeeded at their jobs. They helped boys and girls learn a general knowledge in a vast array of subjects. Boys successfully entered universities and girls made their proper entrances into society. Also, during the Victorian era, Britain maintained a monopoly on the supply of the most qualified nannies and governesses. These women traveled the world and worked in the countries of Russia, India, Egypt, America, and Turkey, to name a few. And in several cases, British governesses were responsible for the upbringing and education of the children of royal families.

Even though some women took positions out of necessity and even though more women than ever before required a situation, the number of households hiring governesses actually increased during the Victorian era. “By 1851, the bulk of the population was, for the first time, sharing in the benefits of economic growth with a sustained rise in income per head.” With the economic improvement of households across Britain more families hired governesses to educate their children, mainly daughters, in the demeanor and manners of a lady. Merchants, shopkeepers, industrialists, and military officers, and even occasionally farmers found the income to afford governesses. A family’s desire to educate their daughters represented “a clear indication by the family to prepare children of both sexes for a future where financial security” and that successful marriages could not be guaranteed. While the hope that daughters would marry still existed, Victorians discovered that with a surplus of women, marriage could no longer be the only option available to their daughters. Between the improvement of economic conditions and the push for a better education system for both sexes, Victorians assessed the qualifications of their children’s teachers. With more families dedicating a portion of their income to education, complaints arose that no method existed for judging the successfulness of a governess before her employment. So, parents started hiring only trained governesses, in order, to advance the education for their sons and daughters. The opening of higher education opportunities increased the number of trained governesses seeking employment. Due to the increase in number of positions and the growing sex

35 Matthew, History of the British Isles, 51.
36 de Bellaique, “Teaching as a Profession,” 967.
divide in the country, more women who entered the market as governesses were unsuited for the position.  

The flooding of the market with women unqualified to teach raised questions about the socially accepted notion that all women could teach. Victorians believed children fell into a woman’s sphere of responsibility and as a result, the ability to teach was built into their nature. Of course, the reality failed to meet with the ideal, for most wives had just been as poorly educated as the governesses they criticized and complained about. Poor education for middle-class girls, resulted in bad governesses, whom continued the cycle of poor education, but this cycle began to break down as parents demanded better education for their money. To improve their employment outlook, governesses looked to newly founded institutions like the Governesses’ Benevolent Society and Queen’s College, to help bridge the gaps in their education. Once higher educational opportunities developed for governesses and women, in general, parents expected greater efficiency out of the private governesses they hired to instruct their children.

Chapter Two: Planning the Lessons

**Victorian Education** – *The system of female education as it now stands, aims only at embellishing a few years of life, which are in themselves so full of grace and happiness, that they hardly want it, and then leaves the rest of existence a miserable prey to idle insignificance.* - *Sydney Smith, 1808*

The Victorian period saw the reform of public school education for boys’ and additional public school education for the masses. Between home, religious, private, and state funded schools the variety of options for education increased. This included more educational institutions, from boarding schools to universities, for girls and young women. However, many households, especially among the wealthier aristocratic and upper-middle class families still continued to educate their children at home.\(^{38}\) During the nineteenth century, middle and upper-class children began their education in the nursery with their mother or nurse maid as the primary care giver. Once they reached an appropriate age children moved from the nursery to the schoolroom. Each family independently decided when their children advanced into the schoolroom. Once the schoolroom opened, parents hired private governesses, day governesses, or tutors to assist in the education of their children.

The education system of the nineteenth century developed out of the educational systems of the previous centuries. The advancements in female education were gained and lost through the centuries. Great periods promoting female education existed within years of restricting women’s instruction. In the nineteenth century female education

continued to develop through series of advancements and setbacks. During the twelfth century the desire for educated women amongst the noble class passed out of fashion, yet 400 years prior nuns and monks received the same education. By the time of the Conquest, females of wealthy families learned to read and write in French, the language of the royal court. A place for education within the home developed because of the dissolution of monasteries. However, “the destruction of these religious houses by Henry [VIII] was the absolute extinction of any systematic education for women” for a long period.\(^39\) This dealt a severe blow to the importance of education for females and took education out of the Catholic Church and into the home. With the development of female education outside the nunnery, the figure of the governesses appeared more frequently in the fifteenth century. It was during the years of the Reformation that Reformers emphasized a program of education for women that focused purely on wifehood and motherhood. In 1561, Richard Mulcaster, master of the Merchant Taylors’ School believed that young women did not belong in school, but they still must learn to read and write, along with music and languages.\(^40\) The debate between providing girls with an education based in Classical studies or an education based on the skills she needed to manage a home continued into the coming centuries.

In the seventeenth century the idea developed that females ought to be accomplished, by learning to sing, play instruments, speak foreign languages, and dance. This education focused girls’ attention on the need to attract a husband and being a socially accepted female. Despite the neglect of females’ intellectual education, the seventeenth century saw protests against the ignorance of females by both men and


\(^{40}\) Ibid., 7.
women. Protests continued into the eighteenth century when Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, famed traveler to Turkey and amateur poet, complained about the neglect of women’s education and the ridicule women of learning faced. Despite the protests and conversations that took place during these centuries, the debate over the proper education for girls reached no conclusion at the end of the eighteenth century. In respect to general educational standards of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the former witnessed a decline in grammar-schools, where boys attended to learn English grammar, reading, and Latin, and in the latter century the effectiveness of secondary education reached its’ lowest level. S.J. Curtis, in his study *History of Education in Great Britain*, identified two causes for decline of British schools. “One was the steady decline in the standards of both social and official life during the reigns of the first two Georges.” The other concerned the deterioration of the moral state of schools. With the decline of educational standards, parents from the wealthier sections of society decided to educate their boys and girls at home under the instruction of private tutors. As a result average middle-class girls obtained no regimented basic education.

The debate carried into the Victorian period and with the decline in schools performance standards the concept of educating children at home was entrenched. In 1803, Dr. Sègur saw “little difference between the English and the Turkish woman” behind their veils; only that the former had “neither walls nor keepers,” yet they suffered equally due to their lack of education. Yet, British middle-class society, on the whole, believed that women belonged in the home and they only needed enough education to

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41 Ibid., 9.  
42 Lady Montagu helped bring the inoculation of smallpox to England.  
attract a husband. Education in the home expanded from the upper classes and it became fashionable for middle-class families to have governesses. As the century progressed and greater numbers of women needed to earn a living, larger portions of society saw the value to female education. Economically the nineteenth century witnessed booming gains and repressions, but on the whole middle-class Britons’ wealth increased during these years.\textsuperscript{45}

In addition to economic social mobility, Victorians began to achieve upward societal mobility through education. However, girls were not expected to participate because they could not achieve social status based on their own efforts but rather came by their status as result of their father’s station or their husband’s. This especially applied among the new middle-class families where girls received little more from their education than instruction in singing, dancing, playing the piano, and social etiquette. The goal of middle-class families was to make their daughters marriageable and “graceful ornaments in the home over which they would preside.”\textsuperscript{46} Marriages represented an important economic connection between the two families. So marriages developed more as a business transaction versus a joining of two individuals in love. The Taunton Report of 1868 documented the poor quality of middle-class girls’ education and blamed the overall condition on the neglect of parents.\textsuperscript{47}

Victorian gentlewomen received different educations based the prerogative of their parents and their own desire to dedicate time to lessons. It was the norm for girls of

\textsuperscript{45} The economics of Great Britain are interesting during this period because the number of families hiring governesses increased, yet, the number of governesses needing jobs increased, which means their families were unable to support these young ladies. The Britons in the nineteenth century faced the possibility to great economic gain or disaster.

\textsuperscript{46} Holcombe, \textit{Victorian Ladies at Work}, 4.

\textsuperscript{47} Renton, \textit{Tyrant or Victim?}, 82-83.
the aristocracy to be educated beyond accomplishments, which included music, drawing, dancing, and proficiency in one or more musical instruments. The education was regular, it was serious, and it mattered. Girls retired to the schoolroom for portions of each day to conduct their studies. Upper-middle class females also received a broad education that included the arts, languages, some science, and accomplishments. Fenton John Anthony Hort, professor of divinity at Cambridge from 1878 believed that most men, even those without extensive knowledge would hate women with only a decorative education.

“While showy and shallow education may have been the fate of the daughters of upwardly mobile tradesmen, it was not the standard of the upper-middle class.” These wealthier families in society also traditionally lived on a large enough income to devote portions to the hiring of governesses, private tutors, and masters. During the nineteenth century self-learning was encouraged through the reading of whatever books the student. Agnes Porter, a governess who served at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning to the nineteenth with the children and grandchildren of the second Earl of Ilchester, revealed in her letters and journals attempts to learn Italian, Latin, and German through self-study. Girls benefitted from the freedom of independent study.

The Education of Governesses - “And, surely, Education, on which depends in a great measure, the welfare and happiness of life, ought not to be instructed to unqualified persons.” – Susan Ridout, 1840

Families required governesses to teach a variety of subjects to both their male and female offspring. Discussion of the various subjects governesses taught will be addressed

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in the chapter three, which deals with schoolroom lessons. Despite the required wide range of general knowledge governesses needed other skills to be successful at their profession. Susan Ridout, in her *Letters to a Young Governess*, spends a great deal of time discussing these qualities. Ridout identifies deportment, self-renunciation, justice, punctuality, self-confidence, decision of character and well grounded principles, along with correct knowledge as a few of the qualities necessary to governesses. She also believed governesses required “sound religious principles; some knowledge of the human heart, and of the mental powers; a comprehensive view of Education, and its chief end; kind sympathetic feelings towards children; and that degree of moral stamina which shall give efficiency to her exertions.”

Integrity was the final characteristic essential to governesses. Integrity helped governesses interact with pupils and their parents, in a manner that endeavored always to be just, true, and kind. Armed with these qualities, along with a sound education and several established accomplishments, governesses sought out positions. In addition to Ridout’s extensive list of qualifications, families demanded one more crucial characteristic from a potential governess. She had to be a lady.

Despite the families that desired a good education for their children and despite those governesses who actually excelled at providing a well rounded education, governesses fought an uphill battle to obtain enough knowledge to perform their duties. Especially at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the thought prevailed that women lacked the same mental capabilities as men. Many Victorians believed that men and women embodied different intellectual facets, such as men’s ability to study for

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51 Ibid., 58-62.
prolonged periods, while women were natural flighty and unable to focus. As a result many Britons failed to see any reason to educate their females beyond a certain point. “There is no question that affection and the moral qualities generally, form the best part of a woman’s character. To stint these for the sake of her intellectual development, which will never be worth the sacrifice, is to create a monster, and a foolish one.”52 So amidst an atmosphere of female education neglect, families expected governesses to have the general knowledge and an aptitude for teaching, even with the societal expectation that women cannot focus on learning, a governess was required to know a large variety of subjects.

Nelly Weeton, a governess, recalled in her memoirs that she received her education from an usher from Mr. Baithwaite’s School, where her brother attended, and the usher taught her “Writing, Arithmetic, a little Grammar, and a little Geography.”53 Weeton continued discussing the topics she wanted to learn, such as Latin, French, the arts and sciences. During free time or if the resources were available, Weeton might have pursued these topics in self study. She felt her education ruined her pleasure of the more domestic pursuits in life, like sewing, writing copies, and washing dishes. Weeton enjoyed arithmetic the most and progressed rapidly in “Fractions, Decimals, &c., Book keeping.”54 Weeton came from a middle class family that was not wealthy, but her education reflected the value her family placed on education. The subjects Weeton learned throughout her childhood and adolescence represented her basic qualifications when she sought a governessing position.

54 Ibid., 14.
The greatest qualification of a woman entering the profession of governesses was her background as a lady. When a family advertised, potential candidates sent letters of application to that household. In *Work and Leisure*, S.Y.E., a woman in charge of hiring governesses, impressed upon other governesses the necessity to write a thorough and proper application letter. Without the proper letter, S.Y.E. asked, how would one be able to discriminate among all the letters for a woman capable of governing her children.\(^55\)

Part of the information S.Y.E. desired to acquire concerned the candidate’s father’s profession, where he lived, how she was raised, who her mother was the daughter of, and where and how the candidate obtained her education. Establishing the governess resided in the correct social class, families also required governesses to list the subject matter and topics each candidate felt qualified to teach. Many parents searched for governesses with a particular set of subjects she must be able to teach in mind. Parents often listed these qualifications in their advertisements.

*Wanted, a Governess, on Handsome Terms. Governess – a comfortable home, but without salary, is offered to any lady wishing for a situation as governess in a gentleman’s family, residing in the country, to instruct two little girls in music, drawing, and English; a thorough knowledge of the French language is required.*\(^56\)

While *The Times* published this advertisement, employers and governesses posted their information and requirements in many media outlets. For example, homes searching for a governess of a particular religious background published their advertisements in religious periodicals.

Through *Work and Leisure* and other women’s magazines governesses and mothers shared tips for success on the overcrowded market. While parents required

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different expectations from governesses, the letter of application proved to be a fairly uniform procedure of introduction and employment. By working toward this formalized process of application, parents and governesses diminished the theory that governesses were merely new members of the family. Since governesses often lived with the family, their presence was seen as part of the family and not for pay, but as governessing took on formalized procedures, the role of governesses appeared more and more like the professions found in the men’s sphere.

During the nineteenth century, middle-class parents questioned the educational background of governesses, and as more women flooded the market, governesses also questioned the qualifications of other governesses. The questioning by parents revealed their desire for their girls to receive a good education for the money they paid. Part of the larger picture developing during the mid to late decades of the century revolved around the notion that if a governess obtained only a partial education and a governess can only teach what she knows, then without better preparing governess for their positions middle-class girls would never achieve the same standing as men in society. Through examining the standard of education of governesses, Victorians discovered that “women teachers in middle-class schools needed to be better prepared also, and that the structure of schooling for girls needed to be changed.”57 The struggles of the governess profession linked to the fight for better education and the development of schools for the higher education of females. Each of the issues intertwined with the others. The issues surrounding governesses also extended to include women’s desires for equality and opportunity

57 Burstyn, Victorian Education, 24.
within society and the work place. Women used their educations to carve out new positions for themselves outside the home, as nurses, clerks, and in retail positions.\textsuperscript{58}

Some of the first efforts to improve the qualifications of governesses developed as a reaction to the “greater competence expected of boys entering school.”\textsuperscript{59} Since governesses educated boys until they went to school, middle class families demanded that education provided by governesses keep pace with public and private boys’ education. Governesses used several methods at their disposal to obtain the needed knowledge and qualifications. Journals, magazines, and books helped governesses share ideas about lesson planning, new lessons, and classroom management. Some articles dealt with forming educational societies devoted to bettering governesses’ education and classrooms. For example, the North of England Council for Promoting the Higher Education of Women coordinated lecture series in several cities. These lectures covered a wide range of topics from natural sciences to history. At the conclusion of a series, the attendants received the option of taking an exam. If they “reached the standard expected of them” then the ladies received statements attesting to their achievement.\textsuperscript{60} The lectures also created a place for governesses and other educators to discuss schoolroom techniques. In \textit{Work and Leisure}, in 1880, Lady Kay-Shuttleworth wrote in support of governesses learning how to teach and being tested on knowledge of subject matter through examinations. The passing of examinations and the obtaining of certificates represented major steps toward standardizing and formalizing the professional qualifications of governesses. Similarly to the male professions, governesses and their

\textsuperscript{58} Similarly in nursing, as in governessing, women argued that nursing was part of their private sphere. As a result, they were best qualified to hold nursing positions in hospital and clinics because they were used to nursing the sick and caring for the injured at home.

\textsuperscript{59} Burstyn, \textit{Victorian Education}, 23.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 25.
supporters slowly created structured steps that governesses needed to achieve or learn before entering the governessing profession.

Also within books and periodicals advice existed for governesses on which books to read independently before acquiring a position. One author encouraged governesses to read the *History of Napoleon’s Attempt of Russia* and then not simply commit principal aspects of the campaign to memory, but try to understand the probable causes for Napoleon’s failure. By understanding the causes of Napoleon’s failure, the knowledge governesses passed on to their pupils consisted of an understanding beyond the basic facts. The advice manuals provided excellent ideas and pedagogical theories, however, a disconnect existed between the theories and realities. The importance of the advice manuals and the new teaching techniques was that resources existed so that governesses could use them in their schoolrooms. The existence of manuals also reveals that Victorians were writing, talking about, and considering changes to the education system, not just for learners, but educators too.

The improvement of female education and the increasing number of governesses prepared for their profession reinforced the rising status of teachers and governesses, from merely workers, to that of true professionals. Mary Porter, during the 1860s founded a school, in Triverton, with the aim of educating her pupils to be governesses. Most of Porter’s pupils were daughters of professional men, who were often not successful at their entrepreneurial enterprises. These students learned “French, German, drawing, music, and elementary Latin, but on top of this they studied the art of teaching.” Porter provided that standard education her students needed to properly educate their own pupils.

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in the future. The addition of studying the pedagogy of teaching made Porter’s school unique. The girls ranged in age from sixteen to twenty. Even some women, who already worked as governesses, signed up for classes, in order to improve their skills and hopefully enhance their earning power. By earning certificates for classes and lectures they attended, some governesses succeeded in increasing the yearly pay rate.

The pursuit of knowledge came to be understood as a way to obtain personal welfare and happiness out of life, and therefore the person guiding learning must be qualified. No longer did governesses represent a lady down on her luck and in need of a home and income. Governesses hoped that the improvement in their status and education would result in higher incomes and public respect as a qualified professional, just like a male tutor. One of the downsides to the advancements of governesses’ education resulted in a smaller number of certified governesses on the market. Women unable to acquire the new certificates of education needed other employment opportunities. This contributed to the push for women’s employment in other disciplines. Many of the journal articles that covered the plight and advancements made by governesses dealt with other career paths in which women would succeed. The English Woman’s Journal tackled the subject of women’s work in several articles in the late 1850s and early 1860s. Within the articles, “On the Adoption of Professional Life by Women,” “Association for Promoting the Employment of Women,” The Market for Educated Female Labor,” and “What Can Educated Women Do?” the authors addressed issues facing female labor, the skills women possessed, which careers ought to be opened to women, and the need for better education so women can succeed in new positions. The ability for governesses to obtain certificates and obtain extra education increased their value on the overcrowded job
market. Governesses benefitted from the opening of higher institutions to women and to the changing notions about the significance of education and the teacher who provide the lessons.

**The Education of Girls** – *Of the private education of this century, it seems to me we have cause to think well, considering that the object to be attained in regard to female training is a general balance and sound culture, rather than technical proficiency in certain branches of knowledge. As more distinct paths and professions open to women, in accordance with the social tendencies of the day, of course provision must be made for their being furnished with special knowledge requisite to such ends.* – Bessie Rayner Parkes, 1865.

In order to better illustrate the connections between the education of governesses, the advancements made in the education of females, and the role governesses played in educational advancements, an examination of the education of middle-class girls is required. Governesses were the victims of the idea that the education of girls was of no importance. Since many of the girls’ that became governesses received only desultory intellectual training from their governesses or private schools, the education of girls during the first half of the century was entrusted to poorly educated teachers.

During the nineteenth century, many Victorians believed “that is a certain stock of knowledge obtained, a certain number of burrowed thoughts and isolated facts lodged in the memory, a certain degree of dexterity in Music and Painting acquired, th[a]n the Education of a young lady is completed.”63 Despite this outlook, the education of females advanced from simply the teaching accomplishments, to the instruction of ‘useful’ subjects. Useful subjects consisted of skills needed to manage the home, such as, math and book keeping. During the later decades of the century, more opportunities existed for

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girls to receive higher education outside the home. While some colleges allowed females to attend lectures and complete course work, initially few allowed females to graduate with degrees; rather, they were issued certificates of standard upon the completion of their course work.

Parents often provided the best education for their girls as they could afford. Parents employed female as well as male tutors. Many governesses or tutors found positions teaching one or two subjects based on their specialty or in the subjects that parents felt they failed to adequately teach their children. In households with incomes set aside for education, parents hired ‘visiting masters’, in addition to their resident governess, to polish up a girl’s accomplishments, such as dancing, singing, painting, and this even included intellectual accomplishments, such as mathematic, classics, and science. While most parents could not afford masters or failed to see the importance of their lessons, enough girls benefitted from the masters, and went on to be great artists or scholars. For example, Valentine Bartholomew studied flower painting, water colors, and oil painting. The Royal Academy showcased thirteen of her portraits. Harriot Elliott studied music with the professor of music at Cambridge and principle pianist with the Royal Academy of Music, Sterndale Bennett.64 Upper-middle class girls acquired educations from teachers of distinction.

However, girls did not benefit from the education of famous tutors until their adolescent years, until then they occupied the schoolroom with their siblings. Boys and girls learned together until boys left for boarding school to prepare for their university entrance exams. At this point the education of girls continued with their governess or some went for a few years to boarding school and possibly even attending a finishing

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school. “The experience of being kept at home and being taught by mothers or
governesses whilst brothers were sent away to school was one shared by large numbers of
middle-class girls.”

Many girls envied their brothers’ educations and understood from an early age that boys’ educations were seen as more important than their own. Daughters were schooled in dependence and family relations and teachers protected girls from undesirable social connections. Girls experienced the reality of their inferiority even amongst their teachers. When male tutors entered the home, they taught higher-ranking subjects and were treated with respect, which was usually not awarded a governess.

Advocates for the reform of female education argued that women needed proper training in skills useful not only to their sphere, but skills needed in wage-earning professions, also. With the Census of 1851, Victorians obtained statistical truth that one out of every three girls raised would have to “fight the great battle for bread” and presently most entered the “contest ill taught, untrained, and most insufficiently prepared.”

A.R.L. wrote an article. “Tuition or Trade?” for *The English Woman’s Journal* and within this article she discusses some of the benefits women gained from better education, such as, practical sense, mental perseverance, cool judgment, and more accuracy.

The academic values found in families of the middle-classes varied greatly. However the home instruction a girl received depended greatly on the emphasis placed on intellectual pursuits. Based on the subjects and accomplishments parents desired taught to their daughter, they hired governesses claiming those particular skills. Some parents requested that their girls be taught the same curriculum as their brothers; others

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required the emphasis be placed on the teaching of social graces and musical or artistic accomplishments. Susan Ridout, in her manual for governesses concluded that boys needed to be educated with a specific objective and particular studies based on the profession they entered in their adulthood. Girls, on the other hand, required intellectual instruction; however, girls’ education must be based on “the general discipline and culture of the mind, and the improvement of their moral and religious character.”67 Because education was not standardized during this century no two girls received the exact same education.

Many families expressed concern in the religious upbringing of their daughters. Governesses might secure a position over a more qualified governess because her religious principles reflected those of the families. Based on the moral and religious training girls needed, the household oracle Jane Loudon, in 1840, declared to parents that education of girls “under a governess is the safest, the healthiest and pleasantest, the most effectual and cheapest form of education.”68 Despite the support for the education of governesses, middle-class parents still sent their children to private schools in their cities or to boarding schools across England. Private schools offered different educational experiences and no two schools taught material the same way.

Middle-class families, with recently earned wealth, used governesses or private schools to instruct their daughters in the social behaviors that their new social position required. Private schools undertook the education of only a small number of girls at one time. Parents’ frequently examined the social status of the other girls in a school before enrolling their children. As a result, most students attending a private school came from

68 Brandon, Governess: Real Jane Eyres, 19.
similar backgrounds. The demand by newly wealthy parents to educate their daughters for their new life reduced the girls’ opportunities to experience an education based on subjects, but rather experienced one based on social accomplishments. Girls between the ages of twelve and thirteen until about seventeen might attend a boarding school. Sometimes girls received their entire educational instruction at boarding schools. At other times, parents sent their daughters to boarding schools in the last year or two of their education. During this time then the boarding school served as a finishing school that prepared girls for their entrance into polite society and marriage market.

Private schools and boarding schools often provided instruction of little value; however these schools provided the foundation for the development of an education system for girls. The expansion of elementary education throughout the 1840s through the work of religious associations and government grants sparked a “network of publicly funded elementary training colleges.” By 1864, eighteen governmental funded training colleges existed for women to attend. Even though the schools were intended to train lower middle-class women to teach children of the lowest social rungs of society, the colleges saw an increasing number of women from the middle-class enrolling. Government intervention and funding, prior to the 1870 Education Act, focused on the educational instruction of children from the lower-classes. The Taunton Report of 1864-68 discovered that the quality of education provided to middle-class girls was poor and this was a result of parents neglect. And despite the raising income of schoolteachers, governesses failed to benefit from an increase in wages because middle-class parents failed to value their governesses. Other issues, such as, a governess’ position as a

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69 de Bellaigue, “Teaching as a Profession,” 971.
70 This report checked private schools that allowed them entrance.
gentlewoman played into the rate at which governesses were paid.\textsuperscript{71} Parents played the leading role in advancing the education of their daughters. Activists, such as Emily Davies, could only influence change to a certain point before the parents of daughters needed to step in and demand better education for their girls.

\textsuperscript{71} I undertake the discussion of governesses’ pay rate in Chapter 4.
Chapter Three: Using Resources

Publications that Aided Governesses – “There are so many ways in which Governesses might help each other if there were but a way to bring them together.” – Anonymous, 1881

Victorians debated the issues of higher education, the merits of the professionalization of any women’s career, whether a part of their sphere or not, and the ramifications of any and all of these actions to their society. Governesses, teachers, and other like-minded individuals founded organizations, associations, societies, institutions, and schools to improve governesses’ education. As a result of the need to professionalize and to improve their quality of the education, governesses took advantage of the small expansion in higher education opportunities for women. In addition to schools and professional organizations, media, especially media with an audience of women, addressed the issues facing governesses. Within these pages a network developed between experienced and inexperienced governesses, parents, and concerned society members.

In the nineteenth century, governesses took action to improve their profession, like never before. Several books and journals dedicated their pages to helping governesses prepare and manage successful classrooms. Also within the pages of several ladies journals such as Work and Leisure: A Magazine Devoted to the Interests of Women and English Woman’s Journal, debates about the education and qualifications of governesses took shape. In the articles and correspondences, similar to letters to the
editor, ideas and concepts of a professionalized work force of governesses developed. Many women, from mothers to governesses, wrote “to periodicals with their own tried and tested strategies for coping with children of widely different ages.” While not all the ideas took hold, the articles sparked discussions about the condition of governesses and their schoolrooms. Dialogues developed concerning the pay of governesses, the increase in the number of women entering the profession, and the organizations and societies that provided services for governesses.

In addition to articles and correspondences, Victorians used magazines and journals to place advertisements for governesses and governesses placed advertisements of their qualifications. For example, a governess who penned an article for *The English Woman's Journal* advertised her services in *The Times* and the *Church of England Magazine*. This governess published her article to help her peers avoid the pitfalls of searching for a position that she had experienced. In addition to the practical advice this governess provided, she also illuminated the fact that governesses did read and have access to print media. She began her article by explaining that she was writing from a little room that had only a small fire and that she tired of “Italian exercises, *Chambers’ Journal*, writing letters, and casting up accounts, to divert [her] thoughts from [her] lonely condition.” In her introduction, this governess displayed some of the subject areas of her knowledge, her interest in independent learning, and her desire to read current media.

Literature for the masses became a possibility with the high-speed presses and cheaper paper. The expansion of the rail system in England created a national audience

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72 Hughes, *The Victorian Governess*, 68.
73 “Going a Governessing,” 397.
for many publications. As print media increased, educated women and women of influence found they had a voice to comment on affairs in Britain and around the world within the ‘sheets of ten thousand readers.’ The elimination of the stamp tax, in 1766, allowed for an ever increasing number of special interest magazines targeting a variety of people ranging across age, sex, and class. The ladies journals tackled issues of the day, and often found amongst the discussions were articles devoted to questions about governesses and home education. The journals dedicated space to women’s education and to expansion of professions available to educated females. In the English Woman’s Journal, for example, two separate authors addressed the problem of overcrowding in the teaching profession by offering fields of work for women. An anonymous author of the article “What Can Educated Women Do?” identified four institutions in which their work would benefit others: in hospitals, prisons, reformatories, and workhouses. While the author argued that these institutions should expand to include more women workers, the author also implied that these institutions existed as a natural extension of the women’s sphere. Women were responsible for the care of the sick and education of the members of their households women argued that they could provide these same services in institutions. In all four institutions, working women would nurture, educate, and aid those in need.

To promote the advancement of higher education for women, The Journal of the Women’s Education Union published lists of women who succeeded at universities in the 1870s and 1880s. In connection with the advancement of governesses, these lists also

74 “On the Adoption of Professional Life by Women,” The English Woman’s Journal 2, no. 7 (1858): 3.
75 The stamp tax refers to the repeal of the Stamp Act of 1765. In Britain, merchants and manufactures signed petitions protesting the act.
revealed that a significant portion of those women had been educated at home and used private study to prepare for their university entrance exams. Women’s journals and the authors of the articles within these journals desired to reach the “common thoughts and probable actions of women who are living and breathing at this moment in all parts of England.” Men, women, mothers, and governesses all contributed to the exchange of ideas that took place within these journals and magazines.

As result of the increasing number of middle-class women reading books, journals, and magazines, the market for periodicals and other print media dedicated to the concerns, interests, and sensibilities of women expanded. Bessie Rayner Parkes bought the Waverley Journal and devoted it to women’s works and eventually the journal transformed into the English Woman’s Journal. For Parkes, the goal of the journal was to feature “women who are actively engaged in any labours of brain or hand.” By November of 1859, the English Woman’s Journal reached a circulation of at least 700 subscribers and nearly 450 of them paid their subscriptions in advance. As magazines gained in popularity readership increased, and they “became a useful forum for debate on matters beyond the immediate household. If the magazine could not provide many jobs for governesses, it did give a good airing to some of their problems.”

Not all magazines and journals dealt solely with the problems of finding jobs or dealing with issues of isolation. Many focused on aiding governesses in the creation of educational classrooms. Journals such as The Governess and The Monthly Packet offered governesses “innovative pedagogical theories,” “ideas of child-centered learning,” and

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77 Dyhouse, Girls Growing up, 10.
79 Brandon, Governess: Real Jane Eyres, 239.
80 Ibid., 239-240.
81 Renton. Tyrant or Victim?, 107.
instructive lessons and stories. Authors also wrote books with an audience of governesses in mind. In 1840, Susan Ridout wrote a book titled *Letters to a Young Governess on the Principles of Education and other Subjects Connected with her Duties*. Ridout, who served as a governess herself, wrote a series of letters which addressed all manner of topics concerning governesses. She provided insight into the creation of lessons, the development of a healthy daily routine which included exercise. She called upon governesses to use their faith and moral values when dealing with children. Sir George Stephan, a legal champion of governesses, wrote *The Guide to Service: The Governess*, in 1844. In the same year he investigated their wages. An anonymous governess wrote a book in 1856, titled *Hints to Governesses, by One of Themselves*. So whether written by a governess, a mother, or a concern third party, advice books on governessing fed the growing market of governesses.

Even though the education of many governesses left the authors of how-to-books cringing, the works represented the knowledge of the need to help governesses in the schoolroom and the desire of these authors to see marked improvements in the educational model they advocated. “Many of those who wrote these manuals had started their working lives in the schoolroom and were dependent on selling their books if they were to avoid returning to it.” One of the most famous examples is Charlotte Brontë, who worked as a governess, then supported herself through her writings. Furthermore, the increasing number of how-to-books and articles to appear revealed that an audience

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83 The conclusion that Susan Ridout was a governess was reached by the context of her comments and ideas. She implies, but never states that she held a governess position.
81 Hughes, *The Victorian Governess*, xii.
was purchasing and reading these works. As the quest for better female education and more educational opportunities swept Britain, periodicals publishers printed articles on the concerns of female education, such as, home education, boarding school educations, and the opening of colleges found for women, or the opening to lectures to women at male universities.

One way periodicals helped governesses expand their knowledge was through the promotion of associations dedicated to that cause. In 1881, a governess in Work and Leisure promoted the idea of a society for private governesses. She called for an association of cooperation, through evoking the passion of governesses by asking,

> Why does is not strike us that there is a power in deeds which is not in groans? Why don’t we set to work to help our own class, instead of whining over the unkindness of Fate? Is it really true that work deteriorates woman? If not, why can’t – or rather, why don’t – we do what males of all sorts are ready to do – what workless females, too, are ready enough for – why don’t we co-operate.

This author motivated her fellow governesses by suggesting the idea of forming a society. She developed a plan and used her article to outline a society that would aid in the education of governesses and governesses’ students. The society she suggested consisted of governesses and students writing essays each term dealing with issues related to teaching including modes of instruction, sketches of lessons, and strategies of discipline and schoolroom management. Once the secretary of the society received all the essay submissions, she would forward the essays to different society members to read, criticize, and correct. Thus as long as member governesses paid their dues, they benefited from the society without all having to live in the same communities. Corresponding societies helped link governesses living with their employers in their country homes and in other

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areas outside of London. Another anonymous article author established a ‘Teachers’
Guild’ “for the purpose of strengthening each other’s hands while they are able to
work.”

Many of the institutions and organizations created to benefit governesses were
located in and near London, so corresponding societies potentially reached a larger
audience. The author of this article envisioned that the society provided the opportunity
for cultivating and mentoring relationships between older and established governesses
and those just entering the field.

Fiction, along with article writers made governesses and the education of females
subjects of their works. Several authors during the Victorian period produced novels
based on governesses’ lives, loves, and tribulations. While these novels provide glimpses
into the daily lives they lived, the writers of these works often provided greater
information about governessing in their own lives. Charlotte Brontë and her sister Anne
both wrote novels about governesses. Since both sisters served in that capacity for a time,
part of their experience or feelings about their experiences found voice in the character of
Jane Eyre and Agnes Grey. Jane Austen’s Emma, illuminates aspects of governesses’
education, station in life, and hopes for marriage leading up to the nineteenth century.

The Brontë sisters, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne each were teachers at some point.
In Life of Charlotte Brontë, E.C. Gaskell’s wrote that the sisters “neither she [Charlotte]
nor her sisters were naturally fond of children.” As a result, none of the sisters found
much joy in teaching. In Agnes Grey, Anne explores the problem of women from the
wrong social class trying to gain positions as governesses. The Brontës searched for

the Interests of Women 10, no. 6 (1885): 167.
88 E.C. Gaskell, Life of Charlotte Brontë. 1857. in The Brontës: Their Lives Recorded by their
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positions and served as governesses during the influx of the number of women trying to
gain employment and as the respect for governesses was reaching a low. As a result the
sisters wrote about the issues between being a lady and a wage earner, struggling for
position along with women from lower social classes, and of the abuses inflicted upon
governesses. In Jane Eyre, Jane appeared in the “the drawing room at Thornfield” and
had to listen “to Rochester’s aristocratic visitors abusing all who [were] governesses.”

So while the experiences of the Brontës’ fictional governesses highlighted many of the
troubles faced, the governesses also reflected the horrible experiences the Brontë sisters
faced in their own positions, such as the unkind treatment Charlotte faced at the Sidgwick
household, or Emily’s position teaching forty girls in which she worked from six in the
morning until eleven in the evening, or in Anne’s situation she lacked the power to
punish her pupils for misbehavior.

A lesser known novel, written by the daughter of the author of the Balance of
Comfort, used her novel as a vehicle to teach mothers and wives the story of the
governesses living in their households. In the conclusion of her work, the author explains
the goals of her book and argues on the behalf of governesses’ station in society. After
reading her work, the author hoped that mothers and wives would embrace “the plan of
placing the ‘Governess,’ on an equality with the mistress of the Family.” The author
realized the difficulties of her proposal. However, she refutes the typical excuses mothers
and wives used for denying governesses a place in the drawing room by using mothers
and wives hiring practices against them.

90 E.M. Delafield, The Brontës: Their Lives Recorded by their Contemporaries (London: Leonard and
91 The Daughter of the Author of the Balance of Comfort, The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life
First, no lady would receive into her house any other than a well educated and perfect gentlewoman; and in a very short time there would be only ladies of high talent and character to be obtained. The wretched race of low-born, ignorant, and vulgar governesses would be lost; they would have returned to the shop, of the farm-house, from which they ought never to have been taken in the important character of an instructress of youth.\footnote{Politics in Private Life, 310.}

Even though the author desired governesses to have a place in society in the home she was employed, the author also desired to restrict those who entered the profession. By having the mothers and wives hire governesses they would willingly allow in their drawing rooms, the author hoped to weed out lower middle-class candidates. The author stated that she believed the best governesses were clever Christian women and that her work helped “procure for them, even in this world, the reward of their blessed labour.”\footnote{Politics in Private Life, 311.}

Emma Raymond Pitman, in 1883, published a novel *My Governess Life or, Using My One Talent*. The work opens with Effie Northcroft searching for employment and writing letters in response to advertisements. The major difference between Northcroft’s life and that of the well known Jane Eyre, is that Northcroft served as a governess in a boarding school as opposed to a private home. Authors, like Pitman and the Brontës, of governess fiction wrote works based on their personal insights into the governessing position. These works of popular fiction influenced how Victorians viewed and understood governesses. The novels and their writers contributed to the conversations about governesses’ precarious position within society and governesses’ actions toward professionalizing the teaching aspect of the women’s sphere.
**Development and Teaching of Lessons** – “A young person, whose imagination is thus defective, should be helped to understand, and not compelled to learn by rote, passages, which, however expressive and beautiful to your ear, convey no idea, recall no image, find no associating link in her mind.” – Susan Ridout, 1840.

As governesses embraced the challenges of the schoolroom, advice manuals and women’s magazines provided aid in dealing with numerous different circumstances. Parents required different services from their governesses. Some others employed her to teach a few subjects a day, others employed a governess to primarily oversee their children’s scholarly instruction, and some basically handed the care to their children over to her. In addition to expecting different services from their governesses, families outlined the subjects they wanted taught. Some families desired a wide range of subjects including language, science, history, physical education, and accomplishments, and many families hired ‘finishing’ governesses who focused on preparing daughters for their entrances into society. They instructed their pupils in the fine arts: painting, music, singing, and drawing, in addition finishing governesses directed young ladies in social etiquette.

In order to meet the challenges of the schoolroom several Victorians, such as Sir George Stephen, R.C. Dallaway, Mary Atkinson Maurice, and Susan Ridout, outlined organization, teaching methods, and provided additional sources to aid governesses. Miss Charlotte Mason wrote a “complete system of instruction for children between the ages of six and twelve.”\(^{94}\) The advice manuals provided a useful tool because schoolroom recommendations came from former governesses and concerned commentators. For example, Stephen offered advice on how to help students accomplish a new more challenging principle. He suggested, returning to the basic rudimentary skills the student

already processed and demonstrate how they build upon each other to create a new skills. By allowing the pupil to understand the various stages, the governess allowed the student to gain a deeper understanding as opposed to memorizing.\textsuperscript{95} Dallaway focused her manual on how to maintain a Christian schoolroom and teach God’s lessons. She broke both the Old and New Testaments down by the themes she felt belonged in the schoolroom.\textsuperscript{96} Despite the work of manual writers like Stephen, Dallaway, and Ridout, many governesses still used Mangnall’s Questions which consisted of row after row of questions and answers, which students learned by memorizing. The following day governesses went through the questions and the students recited the answers. Advice manuals contained enlightened teaching techniques, in one part, to help governesses and, in the other, to take part in the conversations of educational reform.

Each governess entered her position prepared to teach different subjects and some of them lacked the necessary knowledge to teach all the subjects required of her. Prior to the movement of professionalization through education, a governess relied on the education she received in her own home and what independent reading she managed to do to supplement her previous education. To prepare for lessons, governesses often rose early in the morning to read the needed material and organize a plan for the day. Outside of the required subject area knowledge, many governesses sought to learn different pedagogical methods to improve their schoolrooms. Helen Higginson, later Helen Martineau, corresponded with fellow teachers to discuss their readings of the various


methods. Ridout recommended to her readers that they read eminent writers on education and compare them against other writers. She saw this exercise useful in comparing the principles of education and to discover were education theorists agreed and disagreed. Once a governess learned and understood various principles, Ridout encouraged them to “borrow hints from all; and consider how far any suggestion that may be new to you, would be profitably adopted by you in your actual position.”

The author of “Home Schoolrooms and Private Governesses,” suggested that with approval of the mother, the governess should seek out age appropriate companions with governesses for the children and meet weekly in each other’s classrooms. This allowed the children to learn academic knowledge and social skills together and it also allowed governesses an opportunity to share ideas and learn teaching techniques from each other. Sharing schoolrooms provided governesses with more chances to learn and access additional resources not provided by their family.

While the debate raged about the quality of the education governesses provided, resources existed to assist them. Money, parental interest, and availability sometimes proved to be obstacles to governesses in obtaining these educational aids. Yet as Helen Higginson revealed they shared the information they learned with each other through correspondences. Governesses used letters to reach friends and acquaintances, but they also shared their ideas with a larger audience. The advice manuals served similar purposes as the periodicals, however the manuals were able to address a larger range of topics in one publication. One of the first topics that developed within these periodicals formed around educational principles or techniques. The dialogue about education

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97 de Bellaigue, “Teaching as a Profession,” 963-988, 969.
98 Ridout, Letters to a Young Governess, Part II, 60-61.
techniques and classroom development tackled a much needed topic, as governesses faced the possibility of losing their jobs to high schools that accepted males or females.

Organization of the schoolroom and creating activities for the day was one of the first challenges governesses faced on entering a new situation. Ellis Davidson wrote a book titled, *The Happy Nursery: A Book for Mothers, Governesses, and Nurses* which outlined where in the house a schoolroom should be located, how to correctly ventilate the room, and how the furniture should be arranged. The book included templates for art projects and stories and poems for governesses to use with their pupils. Several sources recommended that if parents let governesses devise their own daily schedules to make sure each day included hours for lessons, study, meals, exercise, and play, depending on the age. Each portion of the day needed to start and end punctually to help pupils gain a routine.

Not all parents gave governesses freedom to develop and organize their schoolrooms. Some families setup routines they expected the governesses to follow. In an article for *The English Woman’s Journal* an anonymous governess described the expectations of her from a position to which she applied. The mother sitting propped up in bed, informed the governess:

You will not find your duties heavy. I have three young girls who will require your constant superintendence, and you must find time to read history and science, and give lessons in French, and on the use of the globes, to the two elder ones. But all the reading lessons can be got through while taking your morning walk from five o’clock till six. When you come home it will be time to wash and dress the younger children, as we have prayers at seven o’clock. After prayers comes breakfast, and then you might perhaps give drawing, or music lessons, to fill up the interval until you commence school at nine. At twelve you will walk with the younger children until dinner. After dinner, school again five. Then you will have tea, (you will find us very punctual,) and after that meal, you can attend to the elder girls while the little ones prepare their lessons for the next day. At eight you will have to put Emily and Lucy
and Georgy to bed, after which if you have quite finished with the others, you can have all the evening to yourself.\textsuperscript{100}

In addition to the children of the family, this governess would also be responsible for teaching other children from the neighborhood, all for £20 a year. In the passage above, the governess must be equipped to teach history, science, French, use of globes, reading, drawing, and music, as well as acting as a general nurse maid or care giver to the children. The governess was also responsible for the exercising of a student’s body, as well as, their mind. So while governesses and society often defined the role of a governess as a teacher, they often performed a much wider range of tasks. In some households the governess’s role was as primary care giver.

Parents challenged governesses with the number of subjects that they wished to be taught. However, due to the age range of the children, the difficulty of this challenge increased. Dealing with children of differing age groups altered how a governess set up her classroom and how she taught the required subjects. In a three part article printed in 1885, titled “Home Schoolrooms and Private Governesses,” an anonymous governess shared her strategy for forming a successful schoolroom when the variety of the students’ ages placed a greater educational challenge on the governess. The author outlined a geography lesson that included four students ranging in age from seven to sixteen. The day before a lesson, the governess assigned each student the material required to prepare the next day’s topic. The following class time, the lesson functioned by requiring all the students to work together in order to execute a successful exercise of the geography of Australia. For example, student A “draws a rough sketch of the continent on the blackboard; B outlines the countries; A indicates the mountain ranges; B the principal

\textsuperscript{100}“Going a Governessing,” 399.
rivers (C and D compare these sketches with the map on the wall and criticize). C and D will now be able to dictate the names of the countries and towns.”

In addition to dealing with multiple age ranges, Sir Stephen recommended to the governess to not simply provided one general education for all the students, but discover the disposition of all the students and “adapting her system to each.” By tailoring a lesson to include all the children in the schoolroom the governess successfully provided useful knowledge to all her pupils without requiring each student to work independently.

Methods of instruction received as much debate as the women who instructed. In the 1780s, Mary Wollstonecraft argued that because governesses received no teacher training, they relied heavily on learning by heart or rote memorization. Wollstonecraft criticized this method because she believed it left the students bored and ignorant. Not everyone shared her view. Parents bought the textbooks for their schoolrooms, and sometimes governesses’ opinions were considered and their textbook requests granted, but most of the time parents bought books as they saw fit and governesses simply had to make do. Some of the most popular school books consisted of a series of questions and answers about a variety of topics. Governesses assigned a number of questions and their pupils memorized for each day’s lesson.

Nelly Weeton wrote a letter to her friend Mrs. Dodson, in 1812, and commented on the progress of her pupil. “He is a fine little fellow, and understands, with great quickness, every thing I attempt to teach him. I have begun to instruct him in writing, and the elements of grammar and arithmetic; and they all learn to dance. I have four under my

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101 “Home Schoolrooms and Private Governesses,” Work and Leisure: A Magazine Devoted to The Interests of Women 10, no. 5 (1885): 130. A represents the oldest child at sixteen, B a child of twelve, C a child of ten and lastly, D represents a child of seven.
103 Renton, Tyrant or Victim?, 52.
While Weeton spoke of a little boy of six in her letter, Ridout wrote mainly about young girls. However, both Weeton and Ridout believed that children between the ages of six and seven should be receiving instruction in arithmetic. Ridout suggested starting students with understanding numbers through varying the quantity of tangible objects in front of the student. She also recommended “presenting your little girls with any thing that they can divide and subdivide, lessen and increase, at pleasure; and let them become perfectly familiar with the idea of a whole, and its parts.” Families required governesses to educate their child in arithmetic. While arithmetic was not one of the subjects necessary to a ladies’ education, governesses were expected to know enough to help prepare boys for school.

In the schoolroom and out of doors, governesses used any materials available to them, to help reach their students. Botany lessons often took place outdoors during their daily constitutionals, so students could view and touch actual plants opposed to learning from just pictures in a book. Governesses used globes to help their pupils in geography. Agnes Porter documented various daily lessons in her journal. On June 29, 1802, Porter recorded that even though the family had guests in the house, lessons went on and consisted of “a little reading, writing, work, the maps – flower magazines, etc. and conversation – a mode of teaching I am now more partial to than ever since I read Mrs Edgeworth’s work.” This passage reveals the subjects and some of the methods Porter

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105 Ridout, Letters to a Young Governess, Part I, 72.

106 Martin, Journals and Letters of Agnes Porter, 211. The book Porter is referring to in this passage was Practical Education written by Maria and Richard Lovel Edgeworth in 1798. Martin the editor of Porter’s writings includes an excellent index of all the books that Porter mentions. This provides excellent information on the resources that might have been available to governesses.
taught her pupils. It also supports the idea that governesses sought to better themselves and their schoolrooms through reading of manuals. With many new teaching techniques and concepts concerning lessons, advice manuals and journal articles provided a resource for governesses when they needed new ideas for their schoolrooms.

**Governesses’ Benevolent Institution and Queen’s College** – “*There are so many ways in which Governesses might help each other if there were but a way of bringing them together,*” writer of the article ‘Isolation and Combination,’ *Work and Leisure* (1880)

The availability and price of women’s periodicals and advice manuals afforded governesses a greater opportunity to learn and implement the ideas in their schoolrooms. They received help from advice manuals and periodical articles and they benefited from social and benevolent organizations. In addition to the help received by organizations, some governesses gained access to educational aid through schools founded for women in general. Sometimes these schools were founded specifically for governesses.

In 1843, Reverend Fredrick Dension Maurice a professor of English at King’s College in London and a Christian socialist, founded the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution, with a group of concerned citizens. The founders desired to provide governesses with financial aid during times of unemployment, old age, and sickness. One of the first services offered by the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution was a registry in which governesses and families seeking a governess placed their information. The system compromised of a simple series of books that was “divided into columns, each one presenting a different skill or qualification” and any “governesses who could produce two satisfactory letters of reference might enter her details” for free.\(^{107}\) Families looking to hire a governess placed their information in a separate book that governesses viewed or

\(^{107}\) Hughes, *The Victorian Governess*, 47.
families viewed the book containing the information about governesses and copied the contact information of any governess of interest. After an outpouring of requests for aid and other services, Maurice and his colleagues expanded the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution to include a college in London for the improvement of governesses’ education.

In 1865, the Prince and Princess of Wales donated to the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution. In the institutional report for that year, the board members hoped that the patronage was gained because of their Royal Highnesses’ “appreciation of its working.” Donations contributed to the funding of free night classes for governesses and grants for financial aid. By 1865 the institution processed 16,008 applications for aid and awarded 9,211 grants spending £23,955 15s. 11d. The free night classes provided by the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution through Queen’s College serviced 34,378 pupils between 1856 and 1865.

The founding of Queen’s College in 1848, at Number 67 Harley Street, also developed out of the enthusiasm shown for “systematic education and certification.” The goal was to provide governesses with increased educational experiences and qualification and remove unqualified governesses from the ranks seeking employment. Students, usually governesses and schoolmistresses, attending Queen’s College received their education from the professors of King’s College. These lectures were called ‘Lectures for Ladies’ and at the end of a series the students earned a diploma. Due to the fact that all the lecturers were men, older women known as “Lady Visitors,” attended

109 Ibid., 9.
110 Ibid., 15.
111 de Bellaigue, “Teaching as a Profession,” 973.
all the classes in order to provide the lady students with proper chaperones, while in the presence of men. Despite the fact that Queen’s College was an institution representing the changes taking place in education, the social restrictions of women in the presence of men remained.

Queen’s College tailored their education curriculum to governesses. However, in society it represented a school dedicated to the higher education of females. The classes offered by Queen’s College included the variety of subjects, even math and science. In 1872 and 1873 classes were offered in rigid dynamics, differential equations, optics, thermo-dynamics, astronomy, and dynamics of a particle.\textsuperscript{113} Governesses clearly received an education that focused on more than the traditional female subjects.

Respected members of society sponsored Queen’s College, and it brought “nationwide attention on the work of middle-class women and lent weight to the idea that schoolmistresses and governesses constituted a distinct occupational group.”\textsuperscript{114} Despite the specialization of the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution and Queen’s College, the governing board denied that they were providing training for governesses in the hope of creating an established profession. To support this claim, Queen’s College opened their doors to girls between the ages of nine and twelve, for a moderate fee during the daytime.

Queen’s College was not the first institution of higher learning for females. Some devoted their curriculum to the training of teachers; others offered advanced education in liberal arts subjects. In 1836, a boarding school in Brighton, founded by Reverend Henry Elliott “was one of the first serious attempts, as opposed to opportunistic ones, to make governessing a profession to be trained for positively, rather than a last resort for the

\textsuperscript{114} de Bellaigue, “Teaching as a Profession,” 973.
impoverished semi-educated female.”¹¹⁵ While schools formed to educate governesses, governesses actively sought additional educational opportunities. Between 1830 and 1850 roughly thirteen percent of the applicants to the British and Foreign Schools Society’s Borough Road College were private governesses and boarding schoolmistresses. In their applications these ladies usually specified that at the conclusion of their studies they would not seek positions in schools, but rather they desired the additional training and education to help them perform their current duties with higher quality.¹¹⁶ By the last decade of the nineteenth century the House of Education, later named Charlotte Mason College to honor its founder, developed a curriculum that trained parents, potential parents, and governesses in the instruction of children’s education. Through Queen’s College, the House of Education, and other schools of higher education for females the profession of governesses experienced a drastic change. In many regions of Britain, especially those around a women’s college, families desired to hire governesses with certificates of training and education.

Fifty years after the founding of the Governesses Benevolent Institution, it still provided the service of the free employment registry. Due to Queen’s College and other colleges for females, the “competence of governesses improved, and within ten years there was a new problem of finding other work for applicants who no longer qualified for the job of governess.”¹¹⁷ Higher institutions of learning provided advancement in education for females. Consequently, the governesses received better training for their

¹¹⁵ Renton, Tyrant or Victim?, 65.
positions, which in turn helped the daughter of the middle-classes obtain a superior level education then the generation before.
Chapter 4: The Learning Curve

Professionalization – And parents would recognize the influence which an intelligent and high-principled governess may exert over their children, and no longer seek for the strength of a horse, the regularity of a steam engine, and the acquirements of a learned professor, in the feeble frame of one women. – Lady Kay-Shuttleworth, 1880

Professionalization for governesses developed in part out of necessity, girls needed and wanted better education, and, in part, because professionalization allowed for the potential of reducing isolation, increasing wages, and obtaining a place in society. The governesses operating at a professional status gained an occupation that could be categorized with traditional professions, such as architect, barrister, or doctor. Governesses also desired respect in society, not merely because they were ladies, but rather to gain recognition for their skills and accomplishments. Just as the term ‘governess’ changed to incorporate or exclude different types of women educators, governesses sought to alter the term ‘profession’ to include work done in the woman sphere.

By using the term ‘profession’ to describe their work, they were aspiring to the prestige, the ideals of autonomy and independence, and the intellectual clout attributed to the ‘learned professions’. The importance of training, examination, and certification in there occupations complemented the new ideal of employment.\textsuperscript{118}

The training provided for governesses in schools allowed them to achieve new levels of competence and increased their confidence in their skills and authority. A.R.L. emphasized that not all women were natural born teachers, because if they were then

\textsuperscript{118} \textit{de Bellaigue, “Teaching as a Profession,” 964.}
mothers would spend their time in the education of their children, instead of hiring governesses. A.R.L. continued that while few women received the proper education to be a governess or teacher, in regards to their knowledge of various subjects and accomplishments, to the management of pupils, families that hired governesses demanded more from them, than they would a male tutor. One female “is thus expected to train, educate, and take entire charge, not merely of one or two pupils but sometimes of half-a-dozen, and frequently for a very low scale of remuneration.” Families required governesses, prior to and then less frequently after professionalization movements, to be more than educators and assume roles of care giver and occasionally servant.119

The opposing viewpoints concerning women’s education that developed in the eighteenth century created continued ambivalence toward female education in the nineteenth century. In addition, this ambivalence hindered the progress of professionalization for governesses. Before public lectures and educational courses designed to instruct governesses, many governesses practiced self-imposed courses, such as, the anonymous governess who published an article in The English Woman’s Journal. In her article, she states that she tired of working on her Italian exercises.120 Governesses often spent the early hours of the morning or the later hours of the evening in study or preparing the next day’s lessons.

The rising popularity of hiring qualified teachers during the second half of the century, motivated governesses to be more aware of teaching theories and to practice their skills. Mary Porter’s school, in Tiverton, raised a debate during the Schools Inquiry Commission of 1867-68. The Commission requested M. Porter to testify to the nature of

120 “Going a Governessing,” 396.
her school to train governesses. Emily Davies, a suffragist, argued that governesses should not receive any additional education, than every gentlewomen received. Davies thought training colleges should be devoted to lower middle-class women hoping to enter the elementary school system. However, Davies concluded that the vocation of governesses extended past simply supplying their students with academic instruction to include their social and moral development. Employers also hired governesses not solely based on their education, but on their birthright as a lady, which cannot be taught, but rather reflected the manner in which a governess was raised. Despite Davies’s fear of educating women for the specific position of governesses, she promoted the education of women and training women for professions other than governesses.

Families of the upper middle-class associated teacher training with the lower-classes and the education of the masses. Mark Pattison, Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford, also appeared before the Schools Inquiry Commission, however, he testified the year before M. Porter. He “explained that the daughters of the upper middle class, of professional men, and the clergy, were educated mainly by governesses” and that the fashion of these groups was still home education, even with the move toward public education. James Bryce, an Assistant Commissioner to the Schools Inquiry Commission described a similar pattern in Lancashire. As a result, most of these families continued to prefer to educate their daughters at home into the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Part of the professionalization process for governesses related to their desire to form associations and societies to promote and support each other. “There is nothing

121 Hughes, *The Victorian Governess*, 168.
which so raises a profession, or so stimulates the powers of its members, as the consciousness of some bond of mutual sympathy and interdependence.”123 These associations and specialized training provided a sense of solidarity among the participants. Miss Charlotte Mason, in 1887, formed the Parent’s National Education Union to work with private governesses. This union eventually developed its own schools. “In 1892 she opened her “House of Education” at Ambleside, to be a training-centre for governesses and to provide courses for mothers in the theory and practice of education.”124 Professional organizations protected governesses against the untrained by insisting on proficiency be the guiding force in the employment of members of the profession towards the end of the century.

Governesses developed professionalization in the schoolroom by reducing the parents input into their lesson plans. Parents and governesses battled for control of the schoolroom. Mothers’ interference in the classroom led children to pick on the powerlessness of their governess’s position then exploited the power struggle. As a result, governesses spent time regaining control over their pupils instead of executing lessons. Sir George Stephen and Anna Jameson dedicated a section of their advice manual to the proper behavior of mothers in supervising the classroom. Both authors also devoted time to discussing how mothers and governesses should interact when dealing with issues in the schoolroom and with governesses just simply living amongst the family. The first third of Stephen’s Guide to Service focused on the role of the mother. Governesses strove to balance the power struggle by having parents recognize their status as educators.

123 “Co-Operation Among Governesses,” 222; Dyhouse, Girls Growing up, 41.
Advice writers, early in the century, provided governesses with strategies for dealing with disruptive parents and control of the schoolroom.

The first vexation a governess meets with, frequently arises from a mother’s want of confidence, and from her interference in the schoolroom; from her great tenderness to her children, not suffering their instructress to use her own discretion; from indulgence breaking in upon hours devoted to study, and from her not permitting necessary discipline; but counteracting useful regulations. This evil is a real one and requires great patience; but the governess must remember that a mother cannot feel full confidence till she know how far it be merited ... Forbearance should be carried to a reasonable extent on the part of the governess, but not to a length which would be injurious to the children.  

Governesses argued that while parents played a vital role in the education of their children, the day to day lessons should be left to the professional. Mothers needed to avoid meddling and interrupting the lessons, rather they needed to support and encourage their children in their learning. The manuals also encouraged mothers to observe their governesses and if intervention was required to proceed in an open manner with the governess, in regard to the motives and reasons for the changes requested. Also this interaction should never take place in front of the children. In all other manners, advice writes suggested that mothers allow the private governesses they hired to perform their tasks uninterrupted.

The enlisting of a governess represented the passing of teaching school topics, social etiquette, and some domestic chores from the parents to the governess during her working hours. E.C.J., responding to a letter from S.H. in the Work and Leisure periodical, emphasized the importance of adding a provision to any contract of

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125 Debra Teachman, ed., “Advice to Governesses,” (London: 1827) in Understanding Jane Eyre: A Student Casebook to Issues Sources, and Historical Documents (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 2001), 88-89. “Advice to Governesses” was anonymously published in 1827 by John Hatchard and Son. The author recognized that teaching can be a difficult profession and as a result presents a realistic portrayal of the lives governesses should expect.
employment that stated: “I should teach my own plans, and never be interfered with, unless positive failure could be proved.” E.C.J. made this statement based on the theory that governesses possessed the education and skills needed to run a classroom containing students of varying degrees of knowledge and educational background. Thus the hiring of a governess equated to the hiring of a professional. In fact, in advertisements, governesses specified which subjects they achieved certifications. In 1887, a governess placed an advertisement that stated “Lady, aged 22, seeks Re-Engagement as GOVERNESS. Good English (certificate), Music (certificate), French and Drawing.” Governesses understood that with higher education opportunities families wished to hire qualified ladies.

With new qualifications of professionalism, if mothers denied the governess control over the lessons, it undermined the governess’s authority in her schoolroom. The importance of the responsibility that governesses undertook required an extensive understanding because E.C.J. stated that governesses planned out, in their mind or in practice, the move and principles of their teaching method. Parents freely dictated which subjects they desired their children to learn, but E.C.J. believed that was where parents interference in daily lessons should stop. The creation of a governess’s own lessons or the adoption of others helped create an effective teaching strategy, however, a professional governess held the responsibility to organize the lessons based on the age and skill level of each pupil. The development of a diverse and adaptive teaching theory and lesson plans ultimately led to a governess’s success.

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Society debated the rate of compensation governesses received for their services. Due to the fact that governesses came from the middle-classes and worked in the homes of the wealthy they were a highly visible work force. The Taunton Report of 1868 documented that parents “were responsible for the fact that the gradual improvement in the pay and position of schoolteachers was not reflected in that of the governess.” \(^{129}\) With so many governesses on the market, they competed against each other and as a result the pay rate reduced to amounts of £20 or less annually. One of the reasons salaries remained less than satisfactory related to governesses position as a lady. If employers paid governesses a reasonable salary it highlighted the disturbance between her being a lady and a wage earner. By accepting small earnings, it emphasized that the governesses were less interested in selling her labor for profit, rather it showed her devotion to the hearth and home of a women’s sphere. Occasionally, salaries might reach upwards of a £100, but typically governesses received £65 or less a year. In 1887, “May Pinhorn was getting only £25 in her [post]. Yet by the 1890s, Pinhorn had raised her salary to £100 in recognition of her increased experience and clutch of Local University certificates.” \(^{130}\)

Even though many governesses received room and board, the value of their labor decreased so drastically that it became hard for governesses to cloth themselves neatly or save for retirement or illness. In comparison, other professionals including “some clergymen, physicians, barristers, [and] businessmen” earned “£1,000 [to] £2,000” annually and “most of middle class doctors, barristers, solicitors, civil servants, [and] senior clerks” made “£100-£800” a year. Governesses earned closer to “semiskilled

\(^{129}\) Renton, *Victim or Tyrant?*, 82-83.
\(^{130}\) Hughes, *The Victorian Governess*, 156. I have used Hughes’ documentation of this account because May Pinhorn’s papers are unpublished and are the personal property of Lady Elisabeth Walley.
working men and for skilled women in factories and shop” which expected an annual income of £50-£75.\textsuperscript{131}

Women often worked as governesses, not simply because they needed to support themselves, but many supported other family members, including siblings, children, or parents off their merger earnings. Elizabeth Evans, age 54, supported her widowed mother and provided for her brother and his education. Miss Harriet A. Le Maitre was a widower and supported seven children. And Miss Elizabeth E. Glade worked to support her mother and seven siblings.\textsuperscript{132} All other these governesses and many other women who applied for grants from the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution listed the support of family members as a reason for seeking financial assistance.

Many mainstream journals and magazines rallied behind governesses against their frugal employers. \textit{Punch}, during the 1840s undertook in a series of articles that poked ferociously at employers. \textit{Punch} republished advertisements for governessing positions. The first wished to employ “a governess to instruct eight children (mainly boys) at the salary of £20 a year” and the second position offered £30 for the education of four children in “good English, correct French, and music.”\textsuperscript{133} \textit{Punch} labeled the employers, who placed these advertisements as snobs “for they must certainly be people of uncommonly low birth to offer such small salaries for those great accomplishments.”\textsuperscript{134}

Advice books and articles also addressed the issues of pay rate. Sarah Lewis, a former governess, discussed the benefits of a pay rate for governesses based on training

\textsuperscript{132} United Kingdom, Governesses’ Benevolent Institution, 16.  
\textsuperscript{133} Frank E. Huggett, \textit{Victorian England as seen by Punch} (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1978), 85. In the first years of the publication of \textit{Punch} the periodical defended the poor and the oppressed and took a radical position when discussing authority.  
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 85.
and skill, in an article for *Fraser’s Magazine*. Several manual writers encouraged governesses to obtain a contract of employment prior to the acceptance of a position. Lady Kay-Shuttleworth believed that a governess’s needed “stated duties to perform, a clear and well-defined sphere, and instead of being a dependent,” a governess worked in “an honourable profession and occupies a position in which she may confer far more benefit upon her employers than she receives from them.”

Sir Stephen in his chapter dedicated to the discussion of salary, remained governesses that they have legal rights and protection against wrongful termination of employment and early dismissal. Within these legal rights, potential existed for a governess to be paid the remainder of the length of her engagement.

The Governesses’ Benevolent Institution attempted to set up a retirement plan and financial insurance for healthcare for governesses. For retirement savings, the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution invested a governess’s meager savings in a secure bank, “and helped her purchase an annuity from government stock.” However, governesses earned such poor sums that saving often was impossible. The Governesses’ Benevolent Institution established a Governess Home which provided room and board for governesses in between situations. The Governess Home allowed governesses access to safe and respectable lodging. The Governesses’ Benevolent Institution believed that a governess’ wardrobe benefited her in the job search and in establishing her place of authority in the home. So they awarded small grants to governesses for the upkeep of

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their clothing. The Asylum for Aged Governess opened in 1849 provided similar services. The mission statement of the Asylum for Aged Governesses stated “There is something inexpressibly sweet in the idea of providing a haven for the storm beaten mariner – a shelter for the weather-tried traveler – a place of rest for the wearied wayfarer.”

Clearly, the Asylum for Aged Governesses believed that governesses worked hard and tirelessly and deserved a place to belong after years of labor. Despite the help and hope these institutions provided they depended on private funding and the generosity of individuals to maintain their services.

Lee Holcombe argued that the last essential feature of professionalization revolves around the intervention by government. For a new profession, the government must develop qualification standards of admission and protect against unprofessional conduct. Parliament investigated education and implemented education reforms during the nineteenth-century. However, Parliament established a public school system, which undermined the profession of governesses. The Social Science Committee, secretary Davies hindered governesses professionalization process because she encouraged government to take an interest in the education of girls of the middle-classes. “In 1863 she applied pressure to the recently set up Taunton Commission of middle-class education to include girls’ education in its terms of inquiry.”

Davies achieved success when government grants for secondary schools could be awarded to girls’ schools on the same terms as boys’. This advancement promoted a greater interest in the education of

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139 Hughes, *The Victorian Governess*, 170. Hughes provides an illustration of an advertisement announcing the forthcoming opening of the Asylum for Ages Governess. The quote comes off the advertisement.
141 Jordon, “Making Good Wives and Mothers?”, 457.
girls and the funding of their schools. However, with better public schools for girls of the middle-classes the number of families needing governesses decreased.

In this respect, the advancement of female education negatively impacted governesses move toward professionalization. So even though governesses took the steps necessary to develop a profession in home education, through specialized training and support networks, the professionalization of governesses failed due to the movement toward public and private education that took place outside the home for both boys and girls. With the number of governesses seeking positions the slow loss of the middle-class forced women to find employment in other places. Yet, many in the upper classes of society still preferred to educate their daughters at home.

**The Opposition** – *[The governess] is a lady with a profession, just as much as a barrister is a gentleman with a profession. – Charlotte Mary Yonge, 1876*

Governesses and their allies made impressive advancements during the nineteenth century. However, the debate about governesses’ education, training, and professionalization progressed alongside governesses’ achievements. Objections arose over higher education, the type of education, women working, and women having acceptable work. One of the crucial questions to develop out of this time period relates to whether or not governesses succeed at their professionalization goals. Another question examines whether governesses and middle-class families’ desire for better education, led to the development of a large state funded educational system, which almost eliminated the need for governesses. By 1900, large numbers of girls entered public high school or boarding schools. While discussions and actions of professionalization occurred, governesses ultimately lost positions as more and more families sent their children into
public schools. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries scholars debate the educational and professional achievements of governesses.

One of the oppositions to the college education of governesses involved the fact that while governesses taught subjects, like grammar, arithmetic, geography, modern languages, and music, they were also hired to educate by example in manners and societal behavior. As a result some feared that a college education would make governesses too much like public elementary school teachers, who instructed the lower-classes, than a gentle bred women mentoring a future lady. Mrs. Jameson, in her 1846 published work, declared that she preferred not to take a college educated teacher into her family. Jameson feared that she might “meeting with something of a machine” when she encountered an educated governess.142 Jameson believed that if a governess received an education in the means, aims, and ends of education than the governesses would fail at relating to their students. Another fear related to women earning certificates through education. An anonymous author in The English Woman’s Journal feared that women would go through school, receive their training and certificates, work for several years, and then get married. By getting married the woman removed themselves from the work force making it “foolish and expensive to train certificate female teachers.”143 Governesses and public schoolmistresses faced the rigid definition of the women’s sphere and ideal womanhood. Until women achieved social acceptance for the right to work outside the home and be married, they would continue to face this argument.

143 “What Can Educated Women Do?,” 226.
Mrs. Jameson raised another one of the concerns tied between female education and governesses. Jameson asked whether women “should be educated expressly for this employment.” The issue raised does not question whether women should be educated, but rather, was education for the end goal of employment acceptable. Many of the colleges designed to educate governesses received criticisms based on the schools’ goals. Part of Jameson’s concern reflected the resistance to women entering other employments. A.R.L. in the article “Tuition or Trade?” stated that the chief objection to women finding new employments was based on the fear that not enough women would remain in teaching. In addition, A.R.L. argued that allowing women to work and be useful would “increase their bodily strength” and make them healthier. Victorians not only looked at education as a way to better the mind, but also as a tool to make or restrict changes in society.

Debate concerning the professionalization of governesses appeared in the nineteenth century and continues today among scholars. Joyce Senders Pedersen denies many of the gains made by governesses and places much of the professionalization of the teaching industry on the new category of public school headmistresses. Pedersen argues that headmistresses revealed their professional aspirations in the public realm, before governmental commissions and through professional organizations. Many of the arguments she makes for headmistresses are solid. However, she emphasizes her arguments with debatable information about private governesses.

144 Jameson, Memoirs and Essays, 161.
Pedersen’s definition of private and public teachers causes problems in several of her comparisons between governesses and headmistresses. Private governesses tailored their educational instruction to pupils of the aristocratic and middle-classes. Headmistress of public schools, at least until the end of the Victorian period, mainly educated students of the lower middle-class and lower-class families. As the twentieth century progressed more students attended public high schools. Yet, during the nineteenth century parents in the mid and upper middle-class families feared their children attending a school which contained students of other social backgrounds. Thus home education remained fashionable.

One of the first arguments Pedersen undertook dealt with the career goals of governesses versus headmistresses. “Whereas the private schoolmistress aspired to a leisureed, amateur role in a secluded, quasi-domestic setting, the public school heads aimed rather to secure professional recognition and sought distinction in the public sphere.” Governesses sought positions in private households because that career option was the only society approved profession for middle-class women. While living in these domestic settings, for example, governesses used their place in the woman’s sphere to help expand and advance the education of women. Along the same train of thought, Pedersen states that private schoolmistresses’ aspirations were of a piece with that gentle tradition with roots stretching far back in the pre-industrial era which stressed good birth and a leisureed life-style as prime components of high social status. The public school headmistresses’ conception of their role represented a modification of this ideal. They redefined the components of elite status so as to give more weight to academic achievement and less leisureed life-style. In their demand for professional recognition, the teachers stressed the values of expertise and public service in a non-traditional way.148

148 Ibid., 138.
The difficulty of this argument develops out of Pedersen’s generalizations of governesses. From the example of a governess’s interview with a lady, in The English Woman’s Journal, quoted in chapter three, many governesses worked a full day’s labor, which was far from a “leisured life-style”. As a result of their positions, governesses suffered from homesickness, nervousness and nervous breakdowns, hysteria, mental breakdowns, and injuries to their eyes. Miss Mary Milward at the age of fifty-nine applied for an annuitant from the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution because she suffered from violent headaches, and painful eyes, with vision loss in one eye. She received no income and lived off the kindness of friends.149 Milward, along with thousands of other governesses applied for aid when their bodies no longer handled the occupation of governessing.

Private governesses and public schoolmistresses taught their students different skills. Pedersen argued because governesses taught their students for private roles and public schoolmistresses instructed their pupils for public lives, that public schoolmistresses performed a greater service. Pedersen stated that since public schoolmistresses “considered themselves professional people” that they “placed more emphasis on academic achievement” for their students, opposed to governesses who only educated girls for the purposes of finding a husband.150 The overall goal of the profession of public school teachers was the education of their students, outside of the home, so they could find jobs. The goals placed before governesses reflected the individual desires of their employers, not the state or a religious institution. So while, governesses and public schoolmistresses entered their positions with different goals the result was still the same,

149 United Kingdom, Governesses’ Benevolent Institution, 17.
children receiving an education. Despite the differing goals of public schoolmistresses and governesses, many upper middle-class daughters received a solid education. M. Jeanne Peterson found in her study of aristocratic and upper middle-class girls that they studied subjects beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic. Girls studied history, languages, religion, botany, literature, art, and music. Ridout, in her advice manual, found history, including biographies and chronologies, geography, natural history, languages, memory exercises, grammar, hand writing, arithmetic, mathematics, natural philosophy, Biblical instruction, the fine arts, and composition necessary for female education.\textsuperscript{151} What Peterson discovered was girls were not judged simply on how well they played the piano or danced. Rather Victorians measured educational accomplishments in two ways: “first, by the subjects they studied, and second, by the depth of knowledge or the level of skill they achieved.”\textsuperscript{152} Ladies and gentlemen hoped their daughters married and led socially accepted leisured lives. Yet, this goal failed to reflect the educational achievements of aristocratic and upper middle-class girls.

Another aspect of this argument deals with the women’s sphere. While lower middle-class girls and lower class girls found it easier to break the socially accepted spheres and become public teachers and students, many women of the upper middle-classes found ignoring this social construction more difficult. This also related to why the governesses pushing for professionalization worked largely from within the women’s sphere. These women expanded the sphere slowly by arguing that they were professionalizing teaching within the women’s sphere and not pushing teaching into the public sphere. Public head mistresses faced the harsh realities of Victorian social

\textsuperscript{151} Ridout, \textit{Letters to a Young Governess}, 125.
\textsuperscript{152} Peterson, \textit{Family, Love, and Work}, 45.
constructions. So governesses and public schoolmistresses both desired respect through their profession. Both groups used obtaining higher education, forming professional associations, and expanding acceptable women’s employment to achieve their goals. Overall, Pedersen reduces governesses’ contributions because they often worked within the woman’s sphere.
Conclusion: Making a Difference

*But let a teacher be first taught how to teach, let her acquirements be true and deep, let her attempt to teach nothing that she has not already been proved to be mistress of by the test of Examination, conducted by duly-qualified instructors, and the case would be quite changed, and parents would recognize the influence which an intelligent and high-principled governess may exert over their children, and no longer seek for the strength of a horse, the regularity of a steam engine, and the acquirements of a learned professor, in the feeble frame of one woman.*” - A.R.L, 1860.

Governesses in the nineteenth-century saw a decline followed by a rise in their status as respected members of society. They lived and worked within the constraints of the Victorian ideal of womanhood. However, on the whole, governesses were never quite satisfied with their lot in life. Most faced financial concerns, isolation and loneliness, and they suffered from their unstable position as ladies. Governesses and their advocates reached out to each other throughout the century to form links of aid, support, and learning. While the governesses based in London benefitted the most from aid organizations; printed media made it possible for governesses living throughout England to benefit from the discussions and ideas taking shape.

The advancement of female education was helped along by governesses seeking educational opportunities, in order, to better their schoolrooms. Up to this point and throughout the nineteenth century the education of females in Victorian England followed no standard. The diversity of governesses’ skills, educational background, and success in the schoolroom made examining the influence of governesses on the educational system and on the professionalization of their industry difficult. Evidence,
such as the journal articles and advice manuals, clearly shows that governesses and others desired to advance the education and governesses’ positions. Yet, with so few memoirs, personal letters, and lesson plans, it remains difficult to explore a governess’s schoolroom. The journal and letters of Agnes Porter and Nelly Weeton allow a glimpse into the joys, troubles, and experiences of governesses. However, the journals often speak little to the lessons the ladies taught each day. To complement governesses’ writing, the writings and actions of the girls educated by governesses provide additional insight into the schoolroom. M. Jeanne Peterson provides as excellent study of Victorian girls’ lives and education in her study, *Family, Love, and Work in the Lives of Victorian Gentlewomen*. Peterson’s findings reveal the diversity in educational experiences of the daughters of the middle-classes.

The position of the governess within these middle-class household reflected the problems of living in between being lady and wage earner, when an increasing number of women needed to work for survival and male professions remained closed to them. Part of the problem related to limited employment opportunities as when women needed to work to survive, so they entered the governessing profession without a clear understanding of the responsibilities and arduous demands of the job. As a result, the questions concerning governesses and their profession are directly linked to the whole problem of middle-class women. When governesses and others expressed ideas of professionalization the statement usually included topics of training and certifications for governesses, in order, to weed out those unfit to teach, and finding suitable careers for rejected governesses. The governess question also dealt directly with the Victorian ideal of womanhood and class status. Nineteenth century governesses started the century as a
servant who relieved the mother of the responsibility of the daughters in the household, she advanced to an indefinable condition deemed appropriate for a lady of fallen fortunes, where she was regarded with contempt by her employers and with pity by herself, because she must be self-supporting.\textsuperscript{153}

From here governesses raised the status through adequate education, decent pay, and respectable treatment as “by 1850 she belonged to…the most important occupation for middle-class women.”\textsuperscript{154}

Governesses worked to prove their profession deserved a place in Victorian society. They attended lecture series, college classes, sometimes after a full day of teaching, and independent learning through the use of advice manuals, periodicals, and letters. The movement of governesses toward professionalization met with resistance at every turn. Critics, like a male article writer in \textit{Fraser}, commented on the failure of parents to connect with the education of their daughter as they did with their sons, and he remarked that part of this problem could be laid at the feet of inefficient female teachers.\textsuperscript{155} Not all governesses successfully managed a classroom. Charlotte Brontë developed a dislike for teaching. Despite her contempt for the labor, thousands of women throughout Victorian England sought employment as governesses.

Part of professionalization was aimed at receiving recognition for their expertise in the schoolroom. Governesses desired to be seen, not as the household member catch all but rather as woman hired purely to provide education for the children of the household. Previously, governesses were often required to help with household chores, like mending and sewing. Also governesses saw professionalization as a way to decrease the isolation of their positions. “A governess must have – in common with the rest of mankind –

\textsuperscript{153} Neff, \textit{Victorian Working Women}, 181.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 181.
\textsuperscript{155} A.R.L., “Tuition or Trade?,” 176.
variety of interests and pleasure outside her work. In other words, governess-ship should be her profession and not take up her whole time. More than that, she should have independence and the dignity which it gives.”¹⁵⁶ The confusion that existed between the position of a governess as a lady or a professional salary, as a servant or a member of the household needed to be sorted out. By professionalizing the industry governesses earned a distinct position in the household as a respected professional for her knowledge and schoolroom management.

The writers of advice manuals and periodical articles created a community striving to help ladies adapt to their positions as governesses and ultimately be successful teachers. The articles found in The English Woman’s Journal and Work and Leisure that discuss teaching methods and lesson ideas have never stopped being produced. In the twenty-first century, teachers and educational experts still communicate their ideas, findings, and theories through journals. Teaching for women became a profession and the methods used by governesses to provide support and share ideas are still used today. Victorian governesses and teachers of today join associations and organizations, attend lecture series and conferences, and both groups simply share information by letter or mouth to one another. As Pedersen pointed out, public schoolmistresses were moving along a path toward professionalization. While the two groups worked independently and in different societal arenas, public and private, the end goal of professionalization was the same.

The progress toward professionalization showed promise at the turn of the century. Writing in 1901, Mary Maxse commented on governesses in The National Review 37, (1901): 401.

Review. Maxse wrote that while educational opportunities in England were changing with the opening of public high schools, colleges, and universities for women, those who wished their daughter to be brought up at home and who attached importance to foreign language and music, schoolroom education…is still necessary. And the governesses have kept pace with the times. It is now considered essential – not only that they should be educated women … but that they should have passed examinations certifying them as fit to teach.  

Despite the progress governesses made throughout the Victorian period, the movement by Parliament to establish a public school system eventually undermined governesses’ positions. Into the twentieth century governesses can still be found in the schoolrooms of the upper middle-class and the aristocracy and in boarding schools. Today governesses no longer assume responsibility for the complete education of students, nor do they go by the name of governesses. Families hire nannies to care for and tutor young school aged children and as students develop private tutors are hired to aid in the educational experience of the child. Governesses and the methods they used to professionalize left lasting imprints on education.

157 Ibid., 397.
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