

# **‘A SAD TALE OF DOMESTIC LIFE’:**

Identifying ‘Separate Spheres’ in Violent Crime By and Against  
Domestic Servants in Dundee, ca. 1860-1910

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## Abstract

This thesis has two aims: the first, to breathe new life into the concept of ‘separate spheres’ as a framework of cultural-historical, rather than solely socio-economic, significance; and the second, to identify the moral and empirical impact of the separate spheres in the violent lives of domestic servants in Dundee between 1860 and 1910. Dundee Police Court trials - sourced in newspapers - along with criminal cases of the High Court of the Scottish Justiciary - held by the National Archives of Scotland - are examined to identify the level violent crime perpetrated by and committed against these domestic servants was influenced by the ideologies and practicalities of the separate spheres. Where did these crimes take place? Why were the Dundonian maidservants unique? How were they made aware of their position in society? What was their ‘sad tale of domestic life’?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Reference and title taken from “Domestic Misery in Dundee Trial This Day,” *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (April 28, 1877).

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*The discussion of the ways of servant girls, their faults and their virtues, their shortcomings and their long-suffering, was at one time supposed to be the monopoly of elderly matrons, who had nothing better to talk about over their tea cups. It is not so now.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> *Leeds Mercury* quoted in the *Dundee Advertiser*, newspaper cuttings on the domestic servants' trade union movement, Dundee Central Library, Lamb Collection, 278 (1–4).

## Introduction

In 1862, a domestic servant was violently murdered while working at 17 Sandyford Place, Glasgow. This was the case of Jessie McPherson. It went to court the same year and McPherson's friend, Jessie McLachlan, was charged with the crime. She pled innocent, but was tried, convicted and sentenced to death. In atonement, public outcry saw her prosecution downgraded to life imprisonment. McLachlan served her imprisonment and emigrated to the United States on release in 1877. There she remarried, lived out the remainder of her life and died, an old woman, in 1899. A few years prior, in 1892, the *Dundee Courier* reported that another woman, Mrs McLennan, had enjoyed, "a close intimacy with the parties in the tragedy," and possessed details significant to the cold case of Jessie McPherson.<sup>3</sup> McLennan confessed - on her deathbed - that it was she who murdered the servant all those decades previously, and not Jessie McLachlan. The Sandyford murder case became a poignant reference for British crime novellas as it paralleled the often sinister and seductive realities of the relationship between domestic servants and their employers in the Victorian era. Glasgow witnessed its share of violence, but there was much more to Dundee than first met the eye.

Violent crime, as it occurred in the lives of domestic servants in Dundee, confirmed that this job was a less than peaceful or amiable occupation. Female servants were Britain's largest group of employed women, who often lived and worked in the household owned by their employers. They were busy with dirty, laborious and sometimes hazardous work, in an environment frequently beleaguered by conflict. During the late nineteenth century, commonly referred to as the 'Age of Equipoise', Dundonian maids were governed by not only their mistresses, but by an overarching morally and empirically implemented system of gender and class inequality. This was reflected through the concept of the 'separate spheres', which represented the division of the private and public spheres. This thesis will delve further into the benefits and limitations of the separate spheres theory, the personal and professional lives of domestic servants in Dundee and their relationships with violent crime, both inside and outside of the working-household.

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<sup>3</sup> "An Extraordinary Confession", *Dundee Courier* (May 24, 1892).

There are several aspects of the academic debate on domestic servants, violence and gender relevant to this thesis. The state of gender history in Scotland, particularly its criticisms and limitations, is significant. Scottish gender history has been censured by several historians as underdeveloped and contributory to an omission in Scottish historiography. Preliminary attempts to fill this gap culminated in, what Tom Devine described as the ‘ghettoisation’ of women in Scottish history.<sup>4</sup> Historian of gender and crime in the European context, Anne-Marie Kilday, agreed with this assessment and furthered that the ‘everyday’ female experience was a minor consideration when compared with the male-dominated tales of the Clydeside, Wallace and Bruce narratives favoured by Scottish historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Kilday argued that, during the mid-twentieth century, the ‘remedy’ utilised to revert this masculine landscape was the attention paid to Scottish noblewomen and female royalty (such as Mary, Queen of Scots). These ‘women’s histories’ did not bridge the gap, but reemphasised the role of women as of no concern to social, labour-driven histories popular at the time.<sup>5</sup> In the past two to three decades, Scottish gender history has undergone a revitalisation. Katie Barclay has contributed greatly to this renewal in the last five years; lending a socio-cultural perspective on histories of Scottish institutions and emotions to lessen the divide between socio-historical and cultural-historical understanding of Scottish women.<sup>6</sup> Barclay and several other Scottish historians focus on the turn of the nineteenth century, but gender and women’s histories of the late nineteenth century are still in need of attention.

The history of domestic service in Scotland also lacks in analysis. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, contemporary commentary concentrated on domestic servants, employers, contracts and domestic duties. This was dictated by an occupational ‘panic’, which came to be known as the ‘servant problem’. The servant problem was a simultaneous excess of domestic households demanding ‘good’ servants in competition with domestic servants demanding ‘good’ households. Rather than servants themselves, mistresses and former household managers, such as Isabella Beeton and Mary Motherly, wrote much of the commentary on the servant problem.

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<sup>4</sup> Jane McDermid, “No Longer Curiously Rare But Only Just Within Bounds: Women in Scottish History,” *Women’s History Review* 20, no. 3 (2011): 397.

<sup>5</sup> Anne-Marie Kilday, *Women and Violent Crime in Enlightenment Scotland* (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2007), 15.

<sup>6</sup> Katie Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power: Marriage and Patriarchy in Scotland, 1650-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); Katie Barclay, Tanya Cheadle and Eleanor Gordon, “The State of Scottish History: Gender,” *Scottish Historical Review* 92, no. 234 (2013): 83-107.

Until the occupation's demise in Britain during the interwar period, a unilateral perspective dogged the profession. Later, in the infancy of the second-wave feminist movement, historians of British women's employment began to develop the view 'from below'. Histories of women in factory occupations gained recognition. Nevertheless, in histories of domestic service (where there were few trade unionist movements and work was usually carried out in the 'privacy' of the home), worker's rights were difficult to identify and seemingly inconsequential to the grand narrative of labour history in Scotland. In the late 1980s and into the 1990s, the history of British domestic service began to receive attention, particularly with regards to the 'unique' environment and relationships forged in the domestic service industry - narratives this thesis hopes to add to. Arguably, the most central historian of British domestic service was Leonore Davidoff, who approached the spatial considerations of this occupation from the perspective of historical sociology.<sup>7</sup>

Histories of crime in Scotland too suffer deficiencies, both in terms of women's involvement and the selection of crimes and time periods focused upon. Historians, such as Anne-Marie Kilday, Shani D'Cruze and Louise Jackson, argued that Scottish women were more involved in 'common' crimes (such as breach of the peace, theft and assault), during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries than women in neighbouring England. They also noted that contributions to criminal historiography marginalised Scottish peculiarities to present cohesive 'British' findings. Sufficient research into the history of violence in Scotland has been limited to recognisably 'feminine' crimes, such as infanticide and witchcraft (largely from the pre-modern era) and prostitution (of the nineteenth century). Anne-Marie Kilday's manuscript, *Women and Violent Crime in Enlightenment Scotland*, along with the edited compilation, *Twisted Sisters: Women, Crime and Deviance in Scotland Since 1400*, have gone some way in covering women's involvement with violent crime. However, Scottish criminal cases from the mid to late nineteenth century are still inadequately represented in historiography.

In an effort to combine the above-mentioned disciplines, the theoretical framework of 'separate spheres' is adopted. Historical attention to the separate spheres concept contributed to identifying inequality in gender and women's histories. Its origins in

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<sup>7</sup> Leonore Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

Aristotelian thought were embraced and propagated by nineteenth-century middle-class Western social reformers in an effort to maintain hierarchal social order through the division of public and private spheres; feminine and masculine spaces. As a method of historical analysis, the separate spheres dilemma was questioned by British and American historians Aileen Kraditor, Barbara Welter, Cathy Ross and Leonore Davidoff from the 1960s period of second-wave feminism, through to the ‘new social history’ of women in 1970s and 1980s and in the turn towards ‘gender’ as a category of historical inquiry led by Joan Scott.<sup>8</sup> The spheres concept appeared to have too many flaws to be advantageous in the cultural-historical analysis of women in the post-structural feminist model of gender history and, after a brief renewal by Amanda Vickery in the 1990s, the separate spheres theory - as serious method of gender analysis - has lain dormant.

This thesis questions the dismissal of the separate spheres concept by placing itself on the borderline between scholarship on the experience of ‘women at work’ by second-wave feminist historians and scholarship on class, gender and occupation as social constructions, pertinent to time and place, as a cultural-historical method of analysis. Socialist-feminist usage of the separate spheres concept as a tool in socio-economic histories focused on the sexual division of labour, women’s labour as marginalised behind men’s and the relationship between workingwomen and the private sphere as operating within a society dominated by patriarchal Capitalism. Parts of the feminist analysis are engaged in this thesis to argue homogeneity of experience witnessed by *all* women, regardless of their class origins, in nineteenth-century Scotland as connected to the separation of spheres. Additionally, to highlight the cultural-historical significance of domestic service as a ‘female occupation’ in Victorian Britain this thesis questions what exactly was ‘feminine’ about it. What expectations did these servants face as *females* specifically that impacted on their experience in the working-household and out? The addition of violence, which relates inadvertently to the separate spheres concept, is also discursively questioned through the notion of ‘safe’ as representative of the private sphere. If the private sphere was under threat, what impact did this have on women’s position? By considering class, gender and occupation, I hope to show that all identities of ‘woman’ (as with ‘man’) were intersectional. The separate spheres theory signified the public sphere as the

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<sup>8</sup> Aileen S. Kraditor, *Up From the Pedestal: Selected Writings in the History of American Feminism* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), 3.

space of the patriarchy and male entitlement (which was also a social construction), but the experienced injustices of the Dundonian domestic servants in the private sphere suggested that men too dominated this space. This thesis bypasses the cultural anthropological notion that women's culture created women's 'spaces', which in turn motivated ideologies of domesticity, by choosing to relay back to the ideologies of the separate spheres as self-created to influence women's classed, gendered and occupational 'experience' and 'meaning'.

This thesis poses the overarching question: to what extent did the concept of separate spheres underwrite the lives of domestic servants in Dundee between 1860 and 1910, particularly with regards to their involvement with violent crime? Were servants morally and ideologically influenced by Victorian ideals? Were they empirically and practically burdened by gender inequality? These considerations will be developed upon in four chapters, with the last chapter featuring most violent case studies.

The first chapter explores the origins and historiography of the separate spheres concept, including its appraisals and criticisms, and questions whether or not it is an appropriate method of analysis for the situation in Dundee. When and why did the separate spheres theory re-emerge? What consequences did this have for Anglo-Saxon feminist scholarship? What were the main criticisms of the concept? The second chapter addresses the education of domestic servants in Dundee between 1860 and 1910. Domestic service was a small industry in Dundee as there were comparatively few upper middle-class or noble households, unlike elsewhere in Scotland. What implications did this have for the working-household? How were the ideals of the Victorian age experienced therein? Was the separate spheres theory at all evident in the lives of Dundonian mistresses or maids? The third chapter focuses on the complexities of gendered expectations within the domestic service industry in Dundee. How did domestic servants reconcile that their 'feminine' occupation was less than the Victorian ideal of femininity? What conflict existed within and outside of the working-household that drew attention to them as women? How influenced by the social construction of gender, as it related to the separation of spheres, were domestic servants? The fourth chapter elaborates on Dundonian domestic servants' relationships with violent crime. What types of violence were servants involved with? Were they perpetrators or solely victims? Where did these crimes occur and what were ramifications in each sphere?

Taking the above questions into consideration, I argue that there were several ways in which domestic servants attempted to challenge their subjugation within the separate spheres complex. In the end, however, they appeared to be empirically and morally bound to the ideologies and practicalities of the spheres theory, which created a system of gender inequality. An amalgamation of the nineteenth-century servant's class, gender and occupation led to a complicated life, riddled by conflict, in both spheres. Only through an exploration of the 'saddest' moments of their lives can the true cultural-historical significance of the separate spheres concept to the lives of Dundonian maids be evident.

Interdisciplinary primary and secondary source material is used to research and critically analyse this topic. With regards to foundational secondary literature, the current debate on domestic service and women in Britain during the nineteenth century would be paltry without Leonore Davidoff's 1995 manuscript *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class*, along with herself and Catherine Hall's 1987 study *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*. John Tosh argued that *Family Fortunes* was the first study that expertly demonstrated that gender roles were at the crux of class hierarchy and Victorian ideology.<sup>9</sup> Conventional understanding of domestic service in Scotland, and Dundee specifically, appears in the research of several historians of Scottish history, such as Esther Breitenbach, Eleanor Gordon and Jan Merchant. Nevertheless, I have used several studies of women and servants in England and Europe more widely to bring clarity and greater context to the situation in Dundee, such as Pamela Horn's *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant* (1975) and Judith Flanders' *The Victorian House: Domestic Life from Childbirth to Deathbed* (2003). A contentious issue with the secondary material used in this thesis is that the above-mentioned literature references the separate spheres, but not violent crime or female deviancy. Anna Clark, Annmarie Hughes, David Nash, Anne-Marie Kilday and Kristina Straub, among others, have written on violence by and against women in the Victorian and pre-Victorian periods, but only sparingly mention the separate spheres concept. It appears to me that mostly legal, sociological and psychological studies - such as R.W. Connell's *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (1987), Jeffrey

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<sup>9</sup> John Tosh, "What Should Historians Do With Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain," *History Workshop* 38 (1994): 190-91.

Weeks' *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulations of Sexuality Since 1800* (1989) and the edited compilation, *The Public Nature of Private Violence: The Discovery of Domestic Abuse* (1994) - are the few studies that attempt to connect the paradoxes between violence and the practical application of the separation of spheres. Using a combination of both types of secondary literature has been useful, but challenging at times.

Primary analysis in this thesis comes from several sources. In Scotland, the legal system operates under the rule of Scots law. Scottish criminal trials are advanced and recorded through 'precognitions'. A precognition is the preliminary legal material used to determine grounds for a trial and includes indictments, witness statements and medical assessments. Two precognitions of petty crimes and two of violent crimes are mentioned in this thesis. They were examined at the National Archives of Scotland as part of the High Court of Justiciary records - the criminal court that handles serious cases of physical and sexual violence, as well as murder and attempted murder. I reviewed several other precognitions, which I felt were irrelevant, they have been listed in the bibliography. Other criminal cases were uncovered in Police Court proceedings reported in Dundee newspapers, which were examined via the *British Newspaper Archive Online* as digitised copies. The Police Court is a circuit criminal court in Scotland, presided over by a Bailie and sentenced by a Sheriff, which handles a variety of violent crimes. Scottish Police Court minute books and records from the Victorian period were hand-written and, with the exceptions of Edinburgh and Glasgow, have been lost or destroyed.<sup>10</sup> In Dundee, all Police Court records have been lost until the year 1919. Newspapers remain the only source of these lost cases. Several Dundee-based newspapers published Police Court columns, from which 17 of the case studies in this thesis were found (three of which did not involve violent crime, but are used as cases studies for other crimes).

Crimes in Victorian newspapers were selected for publishing based on luridness and were not always indicative of the 'truth'. Nevertheless, newspaper records proved useful to grasp the circumstances, frequency and prosecution trends of violent crime involving domestic servants, as less-sensational details (such as names, addresses and convictions) had to be accurate. With regards to the commentary on the

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<sup>10</sup> David G. Barrie and Susan Broomhall *Police Courts in Nineteenth-Century Scotland, Volume 1: Magistrates, Media and the Masses* (London, Routledge, 2014), 5-10.

domestic servants' trade unionist movement (described in Chapter 3), the material was sourced from the Dundee Central Library. Cuttings from printed newspapers, which are pasted into four small pamphlets, provide detail on the establishment and demise of the union. Laden with bias, this material gives a contemporary opinion on the Dundonian maids, which I use to discursively unravel their position in society as working-class employed females. In use to a lesser extent, printed manuals and advice books by middle-class women of the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century provide further context on the relationship between domestic servant and employer and give advice on the stereotypical conflicts of the working-household and how to 'deal with' servants.

The lives of domestic servants and their involvement with violent crime represent worthwhile historical research for several reasons. Issues with 'macho' culture, interpersonal, domestic and workplace violence are ongoing in Scotland. In late 2016, the domestic violence foundation Scottish Women's Aid held the campaign "16 Days of Activism" to target gendered violence in the home and workplace. Police Scotland also established the 'Violence Reduction Unit' and 'Domestic Abuse Task Force' in recent years to tackle violence in contemporary Scottish society. Complexities of gender and violence cannot be quickly or easily addressed; nor can criminal behaviour, from both men and women, be rationalised. However, given the prevalence of these discourses in Scotland, it seems worthwhile to delve further into the historical context and attempt to shed light on issues today.

Moreover, as Jane McDermid noted in the *Women's History Review* in 2011, all attention to Scottish gender history is welcome in an attempt to undo the "historiographical disgrace" of the past.<sup>11</sup> Eleanor Gordon added that the latter half of the nineteenth century, generally considered a period of "quiescence and stability" (unlike the Chartist upheaval of earlier decades) was in actuality, one of the most turbulent eras for British women and, therefore, deserves more attention.<sup>12</sup> I attempt it accordingly.

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<sup>11</sup> McDermid, "No Longer Curiously Rare But Only Just Within Bounds," 389-90.

<sup>12</sup> Eleanor Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland, 1850-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1-2.

## Chapter 1. Separate Spheres: Ideal or Actuality?

### Introduction

Leonore Davidoff argued in 1995 that, “Nineteenth-century residential domestic service was a twilight world; domestic servants were not really part of the family (as many employers would have liked to believe), but neither were they legally or traditionally seen as unequivocally part of the paid workforce.”<sup>13</sup> Davidoff highlighted a significant issue that has dogged historians of women in the workforce. How can an historian reconcile the innumerable roles of the ‘female’? A concept favoured by Davidoff, and one used to re-evaluate gender histories of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is that of separate spheres. In this chapter, I aim to highlight the complexities of women and ‘their sphere’ by defining the concept of separate spheres and exploring the ways in which this theory - not without criticism - has been used to analyse gendered and classed segregation in Victorian Britain.

This chapter will deconstruct the separate spheres as a theoretical framework beneficial to the themes in this thesis. I will elaborate upon the concept’s origins and describe the delineation between ‘public’ and ‘private’ realms in the nineteenth century. The main appraisals and criticisms of this concept will also be explored. The division of public and private spheres was existent in part during the pre-modern era, but held special significance in the modern period - why? What exactly defined each sphere and what happened when they overlapped? How were women in the workplace viewed, for example? There are three criticisms to be clarified in this chapter and expanded upon throughout this thesis. The first criticism determined that the separate spheres - as a concept derived from middle-class ideology - excluded working-class women in its rhetoric. The second criticism maintained that the spheres theory was based on idealism and - as Amanda Vickery argued, “didactic literature” - which was ideologically, rather than concretely, relevant to women.<sup>14</sup> The third criticism questioned the sacrosanct private lives of Victorian men and women and how this signified the private sphere as ‘safe’ in comparison to the public sphere. In order to delve further into the body of this thesis, the main trajectory is to question whether or not this concept is both an appropriate and insightful framework to

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<sup>13</sup> Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Amanda Vickery, “Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women’s History,” *The Historical Journal* 36, no. 2 (1993): 389.

research working-class women in an industrial town on the East coast of Scotland. Can the concept of separate spheres, with its theoretical and practical limitations, be applied to cases of violence within domestic service?

### **1.1 Origins and Definition of the Separate Spheres**

To adequately deconstruct the separate spheres theory as a practical research tool, its origins and meaning must be understood. The theory originated in Greek philosophical thought in Aristotelian rhetoric on the sanctity of the female form, but contemporary understanding of the concept was more closely associated with Alexis de Tocqueville. Separate spheres, as a denotation of the male/masculine sphere of the 'public' (civil society) and the female/feminine sphere of the 'private' (the home) was the conclusion of his 1835 study *Democracy in America*.<sup>15</sup> Tocqueville argued that segregation of men and women in post-revolutionary American society contributed to the dependency of women on the home and their corresponding domestic duties. American historian Linda Kerber stressed in her own work on separate spheres that Tocqueville visited few women during his American tour and heard no first-hand accounts of their situation, therefore, his observations were likely reiterations of discourse on segregation previously in circulation (for example, in German philosophy) rather than original findings.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, the separate spheres theory gained notoriety and, from the late eighteenth century, began to demarcate genders, classes and occupations in American and British societies.

The separate spheres concept appeared most pronounced during the nineteenth century as industrialisation and urbanisation occurred in the West. Judith Flanders argued that the theory was used as an antidote to industrial upheaval. Segregation created a sense of order and pacified social anxiety worsened by an increasingly intimate relationship with the "sordid aspects of commercial life".<sup>17</sup> The separate spheres advocated binary categories of humanity, which, as Davidoff argued, were complex and shifted according to generation and circumstance.<sup>18</sup> Binaries commonly connected to the separate spheres were public (synonymous with

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<sup>15</sup> Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (1988): 9.

<sup>16</sup> Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place," 10-11.

<sup>17</sup> Judith Flanders, *The Victorian House: Domestic Life from Childbirth to Deathbed* (London: Harper Collins, 2003), 28-31.

<sup>18</sup> Leonore Davidoff, "Gender and the 'Great Divide': Public and Private in British Gender History," *Journal of Women's History* 15, no. 1 (2003): 12.

‘masculine’, ‘outside’, ‘man’ and ‘culture’) and private (synonymous with ‘feminine’, ‘inside’, ‘woman’ and ‘nature’).

The public sphere was best illustrated by and based upon the findings of sociologist and critical theorist, Jürgen Habermas. Habermas found that the Western conception of ‘civil society’ was a product of the Greco-Roman partition of the *polis* (public) and *oikos* (private). He stated that these divisions remained and were spread throughout Europe in the centuries that followed through the practice of Roman law. Therefore, unlike the private, the public sphere historically represented a place of legal, social and religious distinction.<sup>19</sup> Habermas considered the eighteenth century as the apex of ‘public sphere culture’, but argued that the power assigned to instrumental members of the public sphere in the nineteenth century also headed development. For example, he noted the various religious factions that appeared in the Victorian era (Unitarianism, liberal radicalism and Evangelicalism) as examples of how action in the public sphere swayed cultural and civic identity.<sup>20</sup> In his study, *A Victorian Woman’s Place*, Simon Morgan argued that women were not necessarily excluded from the public sphere, but that men heavily curtailed their presence within it to manage societal progress. In contrast, women were encouraged to adopt the private sphere as their realm, at once ahistorical and inconsequential to the public.<sup>21</sup>

The use of the separate spheres concept to unpack definitions of the private sphere was popular among American feminist authors of the 1960s in a conceptual *belle epoch* of spheres-centric authorship. A decade later, in Britain, the separate spheres concept was used by socialist-feminist historians of the History Workshop Movement to draw attention to British women’s labour history, which jostled for recognition over male-dominated research on politics and diplomacy. In 1966, Barbara Welter published her seminal article, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” which classified the private sphere. Welter argued, through the use of American woman’s magazines and gift annuals published between 1820 and 1860, that the categories of ‘true womanhood’ were evidently, “piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.”<sup>22</sup> Equally applicable to mothers, daughters, sisters and wives, these qualities were

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<sup>19</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Spheres: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991) 3-4.

<sup>20</sup> Simon Morgan, *A Victorian Woman’s Place: Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), 9.

<sup>21</sup> Davidoff, “Gender and the ‘Great Divide,’” 12-14.

<sup>22</sup> Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966): 152-53.

inescapably linked to the borders of the home. Although Welter cast no shadow on her real opinion (that women were in fact held “hostage in the home”), her categorisation emphasised the existence and limitations of a private sphere designed to distract women from accomplishment in the public sphere.<sup>23</sup> Piety was a prerequisite for religion, which kept women from ‘restless thoughts’ and could be practiced from home. Purity was woman’s instrument of regulation, in order to maintain her (literal and figurative) virginal innocence, lest she be spoilt by the influences of the public sphere (improper clothing, men and gossip). Submission was a contradiction designed as ‘women’s burden’. Welter argued that women’s magazines assured that a submissive manner would produce a strong and capable mother. Domesticity was perhaps the most enduring nexus to the private sphere. Welter described domesticity in women’s magazines as a promotion of the “gentle science of homemaking” as “true woman’s education” - an education endorsed over more ‘troubling’ or ‘exciting’ subjects, such as history and politics.<sup>24</sup> The private sphere was a microcosm of all that the public sphere was not, and was therefore, considered the most fitting realm for women.

## **1.2 General Criticism of the Separate Spheres**

The separate spheres concept has faced deconstructions, tests and criticisms relevant to this thesis. Davidoff argued that the chronology, locality and practice of separate spheres were three aspects with significant ambiguities and complexities.<sup>25</sup> The issue of chronology was discussed at length in Amanda Vickery’s article “Golden Age to Separate Spheres?” which focused on the extent and timing of women’s removal from the public sphere, relocation to a separate private sphere and how this ideologically affected women’s status as a ‘worker’ in England.<sup>26</sup> She argued that from the early modern period until the late seventeenth century, many women were ‘employed’ at home with domestic labour (such as weaving, hand-spinning and lace making). After around 1690, household employment ceased. Working-class women were employed in the public sphere as food and beverage providers, saleswomen and textile workers from around the fifteenth century in England, but there was a rapid increase in women entering public employment, in factories and mills, in the eighteenth and nineteenth

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<sup>23</sup> Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 151.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 166-67.

<sup>25</sup> Davidoff, “Gender and the ‘Great Divide,’” 11-27.

<sup>26</sup> Vickery, “Golden Age to Separate Spheres?” 383-414.

centuries.<sup>27</sup> The transition from domestic labour to state-endorsed employment refuted the basis of the separate spheres theory. However, as more working-class women ‘left’ their household, middle-class women (if they were able) ceased working altogether, which reemphasised the importance of the private sphere.<sup>28</sup> Other historians have identified the point at which separate spheres became a tangible and noticeable feature of society more assuredly than Vickery. Morgan argued that there was a systematic “downgrading” of middle-class women’s participation in ‘public life’ from the beginning of the nineteenth century. A repression, he argued, that became apparent among middle-class women and motivated the women’s rights and education movements of the 1870s.<sup>29</sup> Chronological criticisms kept dialogue on the separate spheres open, but hesitated to contextualise the women being discussed.

Another pressing criticism of the separate spheres concept was the locality of the spheres, their ability to overlap, and what this meant for different groups in society. In Great Britain, these constructions changed drastically between eras. For example, Amanda Vickery argued that in the seventeenth century, in synch with the European mainland, ‘going out in public’ in England meant attending social events. It shared no eighteenth- or nineteenth-century connotations of being involved in political and social affairs. Flanders furthered that division of home and work in particular drove spatial development of the spheres in Victorian Britain. She argued that arbitrary changes, such as the creation of residential suburbs, removal of Georgian balconies, installation of privacy curtains and partiality for ‘nights in around the fire’ were uniquely British developments.<sup>30</sup> In circumstances, where British women were active in the public sphere, their activity was confined to women’s bazaars, societies or group initiatives that often operated as pseudo-charities. Simon Morgan argued that these organisations competed against male societies, to which they had their powers devolved, and were popular only as they allowed women’s presence in society to be situated and regulated.<sup>31</sup> Questions of locality emphasised the separation of spheres in British society and how influential it was on the middle class.

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<sup>27</sup> Vickery, “Golden Age to Separate Spheres?” 402-3, 405, 408-10.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 405.

<sup>29</sup> Morgan, *A Victorian Woman’s Place*, 189-91.

<sup>30</sup> Flanders, *The Victorian House*, 28-31.

<sup>31</sup> Morgan, *A Victorian Woman’s Place*, 107-8, 110-15.

Nevertheless, the ‘practical application’ of the separate spheres theory on the lives of women was also criticised. In her article on female missionaries, Cathy Ross argued that women maintained a significant presence in public friendly societies, auxiliary missionary societies and Sunday schools, while simultaneously being able to maintain their reputation as “angel in the home”.<sup>32</sup> Ross insinuated that women successfully overlapped both public and private spheres. However, I argue that, as described by Welter, piousness represented one of the qualities of the private sphere, rather than a depiction of female agency in public. Several historians have cited the prevalence and achievements of women in religious communities as a point of contention with the practical application of the separate sphere concept. Discussion of the chronology, locality and practicalities contributed to a prolonged lifespan of the spheres as a theoretical concept, but did not save it from academic dismissal.

### *1.2.1 Critique on Class*

Of particular concern to this thesis was the criticism of the separate spheres as a theory founded by and for the middle classes based on upbringing and education; presumed uninfluential to the lives of working-class women. Working-class women and women in employment moved between the home and the workplace relatively freely and had a different social and educational background to their middle class counterparts. Male and female members of the middle class promoted the idea that women’s education should befit their class and used this to promote the ideology and rhetoric of the spheres.<sup>33</sup> This ‘education’ was both institutional and moral and shaped the ideological constructions associated with the spheres: domesticity, respectability, humility, femininity and so on. In the nineteenth century, women’s institutional education was focused on domestic management and literary studies. ‘Serious’ subjects were discouraged, which contributed to a fear of ‘learned women’, who used their knowledge to break into the public sphere.<sup>34</sup> Well-educated women in pre-modern and modern Europe were innumerable, which insinuated that women were able to stretch the boundaries of their private sphere considerably.<sup>35</sup> However, the majority of these women were members of the middle and upper classes. Working-

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<sup>32</sup> Cathy Ross, “Separate Spheres or Shared Dominions?” *Transformation* 23, no. 4 (2006): 229-33.

<sup>33</sup> Morgan, *A Victorian Woman’s Place*, 3-9.

<sup>34</sup> Catherine Hall, “The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology,” in *Fit Work for Women*, Sandra Burman ed. (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1979), 15-22; Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 167.

<sup>35</sup> Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class*, 257.

class women were afforded fewer opportunities to raise their level of education; therefore, they represented a small threat to the public sphere. This was one of the reasons that they were less represented by the theory, which I will address further in the next chapter.

### ***1.2.2 Critique on Idealism***

A second relevant criticism was that the separate spheres theory was based on ideals that had a moral, rather than a pragmatic, influence on the lives of women. The separate spheres concept was derailed as a competent method of analysis by this overtly ideological makeup. Anne-Marie Kilday suggested that, given the level of public activity by women in England both pre- and post-1800, the notion that the separate spheres theory existed in its purest form was farcical, or at best, a gross over exaggeration.<sup>36</sup> Although this was true, I argue along the lines of Anna Clark, that women's societal status was never elevated above or levelled with that of men's and there was significant gender inequality, even in industries in which women formed the majority (in factory work, for example).<sup>37</sup> In her largely negative review of the historiography of the spheres, Amanda Vickery acknowledged that late nineteenth-century female politicians downplayed their public duties, even after being specifically chosen to represent constituents in the public sphere. Situations such as these emphasised that, even though the job title 'politician' suggested distance from the private sphere, pressure remained not to deviate from what was acceptable for women at the time.<sup>38</sup> Vickery also returned to the example of women in religious society and questioned whether the situation of women, who worked in a segregated environment with other women, constituted public freedom.<sup>39</sup> The sexual division of labour existed in several occupations, including domestic service and was this not another form of practical separation? The idealistic nature of the separate spheres as it enabled a moral web of gender inequality will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

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<sup>36</sup> Kilday, *Women and Violent Crime in Enlightenment Scotland*, 13-14.

<sup>37</sup> Anna Clark, *Women's Silence, Men's Violence: Sexual Assault in England 1770-1845* (London: Pandora Press, 1987), 95-96.

<sup>38</sup> Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres?" 391-2.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 400.

### 1.2.3 Critique on the 'Safety' of the Private Sphere

The last relevant criticism to be explored was that the separate spheres concept over-sanctified the private sphere, particularly in terms of its safety from violence. Susan Pleck argued that the construction of the family home as a sanctuary, rather than as another place of labour (as in the pre-modern era), presumed a relationship between the private realm and private protection that did not exist.<sup>40</sup> The separate spheres theory exploited the notion of the public sphere as dangerous and the private sphere as safe. As early as the eighteenth century, authors satirically acknowledged this development in epistolary and dramatic novels. Literature of this sort characterised each member of the household, including domestic servants and mistresses, and dramatised the complicated relationships that were formed in the private sphere. Narratives involved unsanctified experiences, involving sex, violence and immorality. Kristina Straub mentioned Samuel Richardson's *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) and Daniel Defoe's *Roxana: The Fortune Mistress* (1724) as two chronicles, in which domestic servants were either directly (as perpetrator) or indirectly (as victim) beleaguered by the conflict and violence of the private sphere.<sup>41</sup> In reality, domestic servants acted as perpetrator or suffered as victim if violence occurred in the private sphere of the household. Safety, or lack thereof, in the private sphere will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

### Conclusion

This first chapter explored the concept of separate spheres in an effort to demonstrate it as wide-ranging tool of analysis, while at the same time illuminate its limitations as a comprehensive theory. The separate spheres concept maintained a presence in historiography until its adoption as a tool of analysis by feminist historians of the 1960s and 1970s. It slowly petered out after this point. The theory was criticised for its indefinable chronology, with several historians suggesting alternate start and end points. It was criticised for its lack of concrete location, in terms of the massive conceptual span of the public and private spheres. And, as this thesis will explore further, the separate spheres concept was criticised for its middle-class basis, overtly idealistic nature and presuming the safety of the private sphere. Nevertheless, the

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<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth H. Pleck, "Two Worlds In One: Work and Family," *Journal of Social History* 10, no. 2 (1976): 180-81.

<sup>41</sup> Kristina Straub, *Domestic Affairs: Intimacy, Eroticism and Violence Between Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 80-85, 95-97.

separate spheres theory existed in forms since the Classical period, which suggests the ability to flux and accommodate alternate contexts and periods. So, can the peculiar case of domestic service in Dundee be used to discount these criticisms and renew the worth of the separate spheres?

## **Chapter 2. The Mistress and the Maid: Class, Conflict and the Separate Spheres**

### **Introduction**

Domestic servants in Dundee were a unique group of women. The cultural-historical significance of these women, their education and the role of domestic service in Dundee will be explored in this chapter. Servants were usually young women, from both urban and rural backgrounds, who worked in a household dissimilar from their own. The domestic servant was removed from her private sphere and transported to another private sphere, which was to be both her workplace *and* her home.<sup>42</sup> There were elements of the lives of mistress and maid in Dundee that were strikingly similar, which created significant conflict and turbulence in the industry.

This chapter will analyse the second criticism of the separate spheres. Did the theory apply to working-class women or was it only influential in the middle class? To understand and contextualise domestic service in Dundee, a more in depth look at the history of domestic service in Britain, and Scotland, is necessary. Domestic service employment increased in the mid nineteenth-century and declined rapidly during the interwar period. Class hierarchy and Victorian ideologies linked to the separate spheres grew stronger as the industry progressed. On the one hand, the promulgation of ‘respectability’ motivated the lower middle and working classes to invest in a servant to demonstrate their level of conspicuous leisure. On the other hand, emphasis on ‘domesticity’ encouraged young women to utilise the institutional education they received to become domestic servants. There was no harmony in this supply and demand relationship and problems appeared, which I argue distracted from the empirical reality that both classes of women in Victorian Britain were bred and educated to be together in the private sphere.

### **2.1 The History of Domestic Service in Britain and Dundee**

The domestic service industry in Britain has a long and diverse history, in which the occupation transformed radically between the Middle Age and the early Edwardian era. In *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, Pamela Horn argued that, in medieval Britain, ‘servants’ were young male assistants to nobility and upper class

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<sup>42</sup> I refer to the domestic servant’s ‘adoptive’ private sphere as the working-household.

members of society.<sup>43</sup> In their ‘apprenticeship’ at a household, young men were instructed in classical education and received manuscripts and writing materials gifted by their ‘master’. It was not until the sixteenth century, with increased wealth disparity and a growth in the middle classes, that domestic service became the task-oriented master and servant occupation of contemporary understanding.<sup>44</sup> From this period, levels of men in service decreased. A tax was installed on male servants in the eighteenth century; therefore, during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, young British women were contracted to the working-household in droves. Women also earned a smaller wage than male servants, who demanded two to three times the wage of female servant.<sup>45</sup> By 1851, the domestic service industry in Britain employed 905,000 women compared to 134,000 men.<sup>46</sup> Stately homes and country houses often still employed male servants as footmen and doormen. However, in such houses (which could employ over a hundred servants), the majority were women. Anne-Marie Kilday suggested that this was one of the reasons the nineteenth century promoted the separation of spheres. Women who entered the workplace through ‘cheap’ labour revealed their ability to outnumber and outperform men in their traditional domain.<sup>47</sup> Gainful female employment in domestic service continued into the new century, aided by the technological advancement of the Edwardian home. It was not until the First World War, when alternate employment was made available to unmarried British women, that domestic service began to decline. It did so sharply in Britain, and Scotland specifically, from the interwar period to the mid-twentieth century.<sup>48</sup>

The history of domestic service in Dundee followed a divergent route, as it was not one of the main industry employers of women. Dundee employment innovated and urbanised from its beginnings as an historic Scottish town. In an article on urban improvement measures, Louise Miskell described Dundee as perhaps the most replicable ‘Dickensian’ city of nineteenth-century Britain; a living representation of all the tropes of the Industrial Revolution.<sup>49</sup> The city was abandoned

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<sup>43</sup> Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, 1-4.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-4.

<sup>45</sup> Michelle Higgs, *Servants’ Stories: Life Below the Stairs in their Own Words, 1800-1950* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2015), 3.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>47</sup> Kilday, *Women and Violent Crime in Enlightenment Scotland*, 12.

<sup>48</sup> Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, 151-2, 166-67.

<sup>49</sup> Louise Miskell, “From Conflict to Co-operation: Urban Improvement and the Case of Dundee, 1790-1850,” *Urban History* 29, no. 3 (2002): 352.

by the upper classes, overpopulated by the lower middle and working classes, suffered poor living conditions, high infant mortality rates and a heavily industrialised landscape; but, as with other British towns, industrialisation brought advantages in employment. In the eighteenth century, Dundee was a market town. From the 1770s onward, the population increased and urban development grew at a manageable rate.<sup>50</sup> This contrasted to two of Scotland's larger cities, Edinburgh and Glasgow, where New Towns were erected - not only to provide housing for the middle and upper classes - but also to improve quality of life due to overpopulation of the Old Towns. Dundee witnessed a lower level of New Town development due to a lower population of wealthy residents.<sup>51</sup> The types of industry that were profitable in Dundee largely contributed to the lack of aristocratic or landed gentry.

The economy transformed from reliance on whaling, shipbuilding and agricultural industries in the early part of the nineteenth century, to an almost exclusively textile-based economy by the turn of the century.<sup>52</sup> Linen manufacturing maintained a significant role, but the largest textile trade was in jute - a versatile natural fibre native to Bangladesh. The jute industry economically supported Dundee and provided (albeit dangerous) employment opportunities. Women were needed as employees, as they were small enough to work in the tight confines of the jute mills to card, spin and weave the fibre.<sup>53</sup> The emphasis on jute trade in Dundee, especially during the last quarter of the nineteenth century when the industry reached its climax, meant that the population of Dundee was comprised mostly of jute factory owners, merchants and workers. This had a significant impact on alternate employment, such as domestic service.

In Dundee, 8% of labouring women were registered as domestic servants compared with 80% registered as jute workers. For comparison, in Edinburgh, 42.43% of women in employment were domestic servants and, in Aberdeen, the level was over 50%.<sup>54</sup> Jan Merchant and Jane McDermid, in their studies on both women in Dundee and in Scottish historiography, highlighted the unique circumstances of servant employment in Dundee. Servant owning families in Dundee were not atypical

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<sup>50</sup> Miskell, "From Conflict to Co-operation," 357.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 351, 357.

<sup>52</sup> Sarah Browne and Jim Tomlinson, "A Woman's Town? Dundee Women on the Public Stage," in *Jute No More: Transforming Dundee*, eds. Jim Tomlinson and Christopher A. Whatley (Dundee: Dundee University Press, 2010), 107.

<sup>53</sup> Miskell, "From Conflict to Co-operation," 370.

<sup>54</sup> McDermid, "No Longer Curiously Rare But Only Just Within Bounds," 391.

Victorian middle-class families. In 1871, although over 30% of registered servant-owning households were middle class, a further 13% were working-class households of labourers.<sup>55</sup> This type of family, and likely some of the lower middle-class employers (such as grocers or business owners), would only have been able to afford to employ one, young and inexpensive, domestic servant. During the nineteenth century in Dundee, the domestic service industry had a different makeup from larger Scottish and English cities and this alternate development had a significant impact on Dundonian maids and their employers.

Occupation	%
<i>Middle Classes</i>	
Professional	15.03
Merchant/Manufacturer	15.41
Farmer/Proprietor of land or property	01.12
Retailer (including producers)	28.40
Managers/Administrators	09.02
Clerical	03.38
Retired/Annuitant/Private means	09.02
<i>Working Classes</i>	
Foreman/Supervisor	00.37
Skilled workers (including small employers)	10.52
Semi-skilled workers	01.13
Unskilled workers	00.75
<i>Unknown</i>	05.26
Total number of households sampled	363

Figure 1: Occupation of household owners employing resident maids in Dundee, 1871.<sup>56</sup>

## 2.2 The Application of the Separate Spheres

### 2.2.1 'Respectability' and the Demand for Domestic Servants

I argue that the promotion of the separate spheres in the nineteenth century was one of the reasons working-class households were determined to employ domestic servants, particularly as they were motivated by the Victorian ideology of 'respectability'. Ideologies invented by the separate spheres concept thrust Victorians into new cultural ventures. I argue that the greatest of these was respectability, as it was a trope

<sup>55</sup> Jan Merchant, "An Insurrection of Maids': Domestic Servants and the Agitation of 1872," in *Victoria Dundee: Image and Realities*, eds. Christopher A. Whatley, Bob Harris and Louise Miskell (Dundee: Dundee University Press, 2011), 122-25.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 123-24.

that affected both men and women, and influenced behaviour in the public realm. Leonore Davidoff argued that domestic service was not only a product of the newly formed concern for cleanliness and hygiene in the nineteenth century, but also part of a code of “gentility and respectability” that determined the position of a household in the societal hierarchy.<sup>57</sup> Respectability was invented and encouraged by the separate spheres concept as a Victorian ‘right and responsibility’ that meant attaining a level of public citizenship to be considered middle class; employment of a servant meant moving up in the hierarchy.<sup>58</sup> Esther Breitenbach argued that, toward the end of the nineteenth century in Scotland, every middle-class family was expected to employ at least one domestic servant for the sake of demonstrating a level of ‘conspicuous leisure’.<sup>59</sup> Coined by Thorstein Veblen in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, conspicuous leisure existed alongside the ‘conspicuous consumption’ of the middle class as an expression of respectability in public. This solidified the shift in British and American societies from - one stoically opposed to idleness (motivated by Puritanism) - to the willing acceptance of leisureliness as representative of class.<sup>60</sup> As concisely outlined in the 1894 manual, *Courtship and Marriage and the Gentle Art of Homemaking* by Annie S. Swan, if a middle-class woman was to remain in the private sphere, the least she could expect was to be able to read, sew and relax as she pleased without being concerned by menial domestic tasks.<sup>61</sup> I argue that it was this mentality, promoted by the public demonstration of respectability, which contributed to a rise in domestic servant-owning households from all classes attempting to move up within the Victorian hierarchy.

### 2.2.2 ‘Domesticity’ and the Supply of Domestic Servants

Correspondingly, I argue that the demand for servants in the nineteenth century was satiated by the simultaneously increased supply of servants, who were coached by ‘domesticity’ as it related to the separate spheres theory. The promotion of domesticity upon British women was largely the result of institutional and private

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<sup>57</sup> Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class*, 4.

<sup>58</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 400-1.

<sup>59</sup> Esther Breitenbach, *Scottish Women: A Documentary History, 1780-1914* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 78-79.

<sup>60</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 29-30, 40-45.

<sup>61</sup> Breitenbach, *Scottish Women: A Documentary History*, 85.

education, which exclusively reinforced that women's place was in the private sphere. Simon Morgan argued that from the mid-nineteenth century onward, there was a clear focus on making 'women's education' synonymous with 'domestic' education and, from the 1870s onwards, institutionalised education for middle- and working-class young women focused solely on home economics.<sup>62</sup> For working-class women, education enabled them to pursue an occupation that might alleviate their daily financial and social concerns. Magda Fahrni argued in her article on domestic servants in Canada, that working-class women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were not necessarily encouraged to work. However, if they had to earn a living, as most of them did, it was easier to gain employment than in previous decades.<sup>63</sup> Institutional domestic education enabled this and had the added application of teaching women to understand the workings of a home, to clean, cook and mend clothing along with a variety of domestic tasks.

It was also considered more socially acceptable for working-class women to enter into domestic service in a household, rather than work in public clerical, retail and factory roles. I argue that this influenced the choices of many young women to become domestic servants, aided by the fact that their education was already programmed towards it. Esther Breitenbach argued that, particularly in Scotland, domestic service was reinforced as a "high and dignified thing" for working-class women to be associated with.<sup>64</sup> Domesticity, and domestic education, was considered as the route to a better life; one that factory work could not provide. An example of a Scottish working-class educational institution, which promoted domesticity, was the Haddo House Young Women's Improvement Association, established by the Countess of Aberdeen in the 1880s. Haddo House educated young women in domestic service and rewarded them with extra-curricular activities such as woodcarving, drawing, reading and singing. In 1883 at the annual award ceremony, Lady Aberdeen expressed her opinion that, "People are often afraid that education will prevent girls being good housewives and good servants. If it does, it is the wrong sort of education, for a girl who has been rightly educated ... will always be the better for it whatever station of life she may be".<sup>65</sup> Scottish working-class women were

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<sup>62</sup> Morgan, *A Victorian Woman's Place*, 37-38.

<sup>63</sup> Magda Fahrni, "'Ruffled' Mistresses and 'Discontented' Maids: Respectability and the Case of Domestic Service, 1880-1914," *Labour/Le Travail* 39 (1997): 70-73.

<sup>64</sup> Breitenbach, *Scottish Women: A Documentary History*, 86.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

encouraged to use their education to become and be proud of their occupation as servants in the working-household. Therefore, I argue that domesticity as an ideological construct motivated by the separate spheres had an empirical impact on the lives of working-class women in Scotland and filled the demand for domestic servants with a ready supply.

### **2.3 The ‘Servant Problem’ in the Context of Dundee**

The demand for and supply of female domestic servants in the nineteenth century did not result in co-operation between mistress and maid and social discourse, such as the ‘servant problem’, spread until it became the dominant discourse on domestic service in Britain. Michelle Higgs described the servant problem as a surplus of supposedly under-qualified domestic servants in Britain from the mid-nineteenth century onward, who were criticised by contemporary commenters for their incompetency, temperament and careless work ethic.<sup>66</sup> In this sense, it was largely a one-sided commentary.

Many mistresses and former housekeepers authored manuals that emphasised the servant problem and described the ramifications of poor relations between mistress and maid. In an 1899 manuscript, an “Experienced Mistress” considered the servant problem as too serious to be mocked. She detailed the anecdotes of anonymous mistresses; one, she claimed, commented that her servants had, “broken my spirit, and ruined my health”. Another mistress mentioned that she, “dare not say a word”, when displeased with her servant’s work, lest she give her notice or leave the house immediately.<sup>67</sup> Other commentators on the servant problem were less theatrical. In an 1866 manual entitled *Comfort for Small Incomes*, Eliza Warren stated that mistresses who complained about the servant problem largely had themselves to blame. They either entertained disagreeable servants without sending them away, or they treated pleasant servants harshly and, therefore, drove them away.<sup>68</sup> These commentaries were rooted in the same kinds of Victorian middle-class households with the same kinds of mistresses. The literal ‘servant problem’ in Dundee was similar to elsewhere in Britain, but I argue that discourse surrounding the issue was distinctively ‘bottom-up’ due the class conflict of the Dundonian working-household.

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<sup>66</sup> Higgs, *Servants’ Stories*, 43-44.

<sup>67</sup> “Experienced Mistress,” *The Servant Problem: An Attempt at its Solution* (London: Simpkin, 1899), 3.

<sup>68</sup> Eliza Warren, *Comfort for Small Incomes* (London: The Ladies’ Treasury, 1866), 13-14.

The servant problem in Dundee was one of several issues that contributed to a conflicted relationship between mistress and maid. Between the period 1860 and 1910, more than a quarter of Dundonian mistresses were the daughters of grocers and millworkers and the wives of labourers and unskilled workers. I argue that this meant they were raised as working-class women and educated in a similar manner as their domestic servants. Jan Merchant furthered, that there were likely Dundonian servant-owning mistresses that had been domestic servants themselves prior to their moving up in the social scale through marriage.<sup>69</sup> She noted that these types of mistresses were known as the ‘would be’s’ (in reference to ‘would be a lady’) in Scotland and had a reputation as harsh mistresses.<sup>70</sup> Both mistresses and maids discussed this class-conflict in Dundee newspaper commentary. A column from a Dundee servant implored, “We do not mean [to criticise mistresses] because they come of humble origin, but that they should recollect where they started, and not fly into foolish [fits of anger],” when displeased with their domestic servants. Another servant penned a poem, “Dedicated to the Ladies”, which read, “Tinkle, tinkle, little bell! / From the dawn till evening fell / Wagged your tongue-its tones so shrill / Seem to map my ear-rings still.”<sup>71</sup> The newspaper commentary on the servant problem in Dundee even mentioned the peculiar competitiveness of mistress and maid, who were both instructed in domestic tasks and both attempted to carry these out in the working-household. In 1872, a Dundonian domestic servant commented in the *People’s Journal*,

As for being obedient to our superiors, it is not very easy to find them in this quarter. There are many servants obliged to serve their inferiors, just because they have got no money; but now when mistresses are getting their hand into the way of doing housework, I would advise all respectable servants to leave them to their own devices.<sup>72</sup>

I argue that this excerpt emphasised the paradox witnessed by Dundonian servants; they faced being looked down upon by fellow working-class women and competed with them in the demonstration of domestic knowledge. Eliza Warren noted that mistresses should be willing to watch and understand how to polish staircases, reuse

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<sup>69</sup> Merchant, “‘An Insurrection of Maids,’” 114-16.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>71</sup> DCL, Lamb Collection, 278 (1-4).

<sup>72</sup> Newspaper cuttings on the domestic servants’ trade union movement, Dundee Central Library, Lamb Collection, 278 (1-4).

materials, clean kitchen utensils and so on. However, it was not necessary for her to re-do the servants' work as this was counterproductive.<sup>73</sup> As Isabella Beeton acknowledged in her famous *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management*, many mistresses felt the need to correct some work done by servants in their house, but did so discretely so as to be unnoticed by the servant, who may take offence.<sup>74</sup> In Dundee, the servant problem and the distinctiveness of the maid's commentary offered less subtlety and mistresses who were displeased with maids, their work or their manner, evidently made it known.

#### **2.4 The Crux of Women's Domestic Education in the Nineteenth Century**

It appeared that conflict between servant and mistress in the working-household was amplified by the fact that they not only shared class origins, but that both women were educated in domestic tasks; an empirical result of the ideology of domesticity tied to the separate spheres. Across nineteenth-century Britain, there were thousands of servants seeking employment and unprofessional servants were quickly replaced. In this sense, the discourse of the servant problem was highly over exaggerated. Whereas, in Dundee, where 92% of women were employed in industries other than domestic service, the servant problem appeared to be a tangible reality. All Victorian women were educated in household management to some extent; but, for middle and upper class women, this was by a private tutor who instructed them - on a metalevel - in how to be a mistress.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, I argue that when these women employed their own servants they were less concerned with how the work of their servant would reflect upon them. This was not the case for the working-class mistresses of Dundee. They were a minority group in the community, as were domestic servants, but were encouraged to demonstrate their superiority in the working-household to make themselves distinguishable from their servant. I argue that this conflicted relationship was resultant of the separate spheres concept.

As working-class women, Dundonian mistress and maid were impacted by the empirical application of the separate spheres theory, in the form of domestic ideology. As endorsed by the concept, it was not only crucial that women lived in the private sphere they needed to remain there. As Aileen Kraditor concisely summarised, "The

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<sup>73</sup> Warren, *Comfort for Small Households*, 83-84.

<sup>74</sup> Isabella Beeton, *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management: A Guide to Cookery in All Branches* (London: Ward, Lock and Co., 1907), 14-15.

<sup>75</sup> Davidoff, "Gender and the 'Great Divide,'" 16, 18-19.

home was the bulwark against social disorder, and woman was the creator of the home,” therefore, if women were to abandon their duties in the home it would ‘eradicate’ the distinction between spheres and situate both genders in a state of insecurity.<sup>76</sup> All women were encouraged to take pride in their private sphere and the inconsequentialities of issues, such as the servant problem, only affected women and the private realm. But, significantly, these concerns did not solely affect middle-class women. Practical application of the separate spheres on working-class women was the product of an ideology of domestic education, which I argue attempted to keep domestic servants, and their mistresses, in conflict in the working-household.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter explored the origins of domestic service in Britain and Scotland, specifically in order to elucidate the particularities of domestic service in Dundee and disprove the criticism that the separate sphere theory only impacted upon the middle class. Mid-Victorian attention to ‘respectability’ and ‘domesticity’ simultaneously created a supply and demand relationship between domestic servants and potential employers. This relationship increased to new, conflicted heights when households began complaining about servants and vice versa. In Dundee, the situation was more complex as many working- and lower middle-class mistresses were desperate to prove their respectability and had the same domestic education and upbringing as their servants. This resulted in the Dundonian mistress and maid competing with one another in the household, which I argue was the practical result of the ideology of domesticity tied to the separate spheres theory. In the next chapter, I will delve further into another ideology placed on domestic servants.

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<sup>76</sup> Kraditor, *Up From the Pedestal*, 12-13.

## **Chapter 3. A Feminine Occupation: Gender, Idealism and the Separate Spheres**

### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, the cultural-historical significance of the relationship between both female domestic servant and female employer in Dundee was explored. Both roles of women were affected by the separate spheres concept through their own classed experience with ‘domesticity’ and ‘respectability’, leading to conflict in working-class and lower middle-class homes of Dundee. The first criticism of the separate spheres concept - that it neither held to account working-class experience nor fully influenced these women - can therefore be discredited; it did. The second criticism of the concept - that it was overtly idealistic - will be explored in this chapter. What gendered reality did domestic servants actually live? How influenced by the separate spheres concept were the domestic servants of Dundee if they appeared to occupy both spheres?

This chapter addresses the second criticism of the separate spheres concept by using the Dundee domestic servants as an example of how the constraints of the private sphere were implicitly imposed on domestic servants as ‘women’. On the one hand, domestic servants transitioned from male-dominated rule in their family home, to male-dominated employment (in the ‘care’ of their mistress) in the working-household, to male-dominated life as a wife in their own home. There was limited opportunity to change this evolution of the ‘female’. On the other hand, life as a domestic servant was anything but a ‘feminine’ occupation. Servants in Dundee worked long hours on dirty and heavy tasks, they were often disobedient and resisted injustices in the private and public sphere. In this sense, was the implementation of separate spheres purely idealistic? With all the practical ways that servants managed to challenge their prescribed gender role (knowingly or unknowingly), can the concept of separate spheres have any bearing on the lives of these women?

### **3.1 The Reality of a Dundonian Maid**

The daily schedule of the average late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century domestic servant in Britain occupied the private and the public sphere, both in practice and in principle. Although they largely worked indoors, their work was

laborious. Traditionally, servants rose at 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning and worked until 10 o'clock at night.<sup>77</sup> On washdays, servants rose as early as 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning and, on evenings entertaining guests, they might not sleep until 3 or 4 o'clock the next morning; with no change in their preceding schedule.<sup>78</sup> The servant received half-an-hour's rest for 'breakfast, tea and supper' and an hour's break for dinner. If there were no pressing tasks to be completed, and the employer allowed it, servants could practice needlework in the afternoon (which was to be considered rest, as it was done sitting down).<sup>79</sup> In total, the 16 hours of labour expended by domestic servants was more than factory workers and shop girls. These women also worked long hours, but left their work at the end of a shift.<sup>80</sup> Many domestic servants lived in the family home and were not permitted to refuse an order at any time. The purpose of their occupation was to serve the household and the members living within it.

Most Dundonian working-class and lower middle-class households employed only one domestic servant. Larger 'jute baron' estates - in Broughty Ferry and the wealthier environs of Dundee - employed several servants.<sup>81</sup> In such households, there was a strict hierarchy of control. The mistress and the master were the authorities, with the mistress usually handling the bulk of servants' instruction and management. If a male servant was employed (which was rare as they were taxed) he was in charge when the mistress was absent. Otherwise, the housekeeper or the cook acted as her second-in-command. The hierarchy of household control followed from there depending on how many servants were employed. Lady's maids followed, then parlourmaids and, at the lowest rankings, were the 'general servants' or maids-of-all-work.<sup>82</sup> A hierarchy of private control ensured that servants were not only under surveillance by their employers, but by all other members of the household. The servant, whether there was one or five, had nowhere to "let off steam" and often suffered mentally and physically due to this.<sup>83</sup> Although Michelle Higgs did not explicitly refer to Foucault with this point, it is interesting to note the comparisons of the working-household with the self-regulating society obligated by surveillance.

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<sup>77</sup> Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, 49-52.

<sup>78</sup> Breitenbach, *Scottish Women: A Documentary History*, 141-42.

<sup>79</sup> Flanders, *The Victorian House*, 101-2.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 100-1.

<sup>81</sup> DCL, Lamb Collection, 278 (1-4).

<sup>82</sup> Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, 49-52, 59.

<sup>83</sup> Higgs, *Servants' Stories*, 9-10.

Servants were also freer to spatially blur the boundaries of the public and private spheres. Judith Flanders argued that servants could walk the streets at night if their employers required it, but it was improper and forbidden for mistresses or their female children to do the same.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, definitions of domestic servants in Dundee could be quite elastic. Most servants in Britain were young, unmarried females, who lived in the household-workplace. Similarly, in Dundee, young servants would have come from the city, the nearby countryside or abroad (mostly from Ireland).<sup>85</sup> However, there was also a notable population of older, married and independently living servants. Jan Merchant suggested that this was because, as there was a high turnover in both the jute and domestic service industries, many female workers in Dundee chose to divide their year between service and millwork.<sup>86</sup> These servants might have lived with their husband, partner or parents or at lodging houses. There were also servants employed in working-households in Dundee, which were also lodging houses or businesses. The nature of service was same as the ‘traditional’ British servant; however, in Dundee the relationship between public and private was often more indistinguishable.

Comparable to the previous chapter, I argue that the ability of the servant to occupy both spheres created another kind of competitiveness in the working-household. Domestic servants were able to do what their mistresses could not do, for the sake of demonstrating ‘femininity’. For the servant, the private sphere was designed to keep them in the home in “a very feminine occupation,” but their existence was anything but ‘feminine’ in the traditional Victorian sense.<sup>87</sup> The servant’s prescriptive role as a ‘female’ had little significance in the private sphere, where the maid-of-all-work was, by name and by nature, an all-encompassing task-driven occupation.<sup>88</sup> In the public sphere, servants were encouraged to demonstrate an appropriate level of femininity with a neat and pressed uniform, considerate and obedient behaviour and no engagement with misbehaviour; however, as Anna Clark noted, this was difficult to guarantee due to their ability to occupy both spheres.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Flanders, *The Victorian House*, 114.

<sup>85</sup> Merchant, “‘An Insurrection of Maids,’” 131

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>87</sup> Clark, *Women’s Silence, Men’s Violence*, 104.

<sup>88</sup> Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, 49-52.

<sup>89</sup> Clark, *Women’s Silence, Men’s Violence*, 104.

### 3.2 Domestic Servants and Resistance to Injustice

Domestic servants were involved in several forms of resistance in the private and public spheres. Judith Flanders noted that narratives of “illegitimate births, theft, drunkenness, prostitution, infanticide and suicide,” among the servant population of Britain were ubiquitous.<sup>90</sup> This may be overstating things in relation to the modest servant population of Dundee, but I argue that it was evident that domestic servants engaged in behaviour that deviated from their prescribed gender roles, either as defiance or as a protest toward injustice in their occupation.

Theft was one practical example of servant’s defiance and resistance. In 1871, an article on “Women and Crime” was published in the *Dundee Courier*. It contrasted the “captivating sensation in a life of crime” with “the quiet drudgery and monotonous round of domestic service”.<sup>91</sup> This article equated engagement with crime as amusing, rather than an act fuelled by desperation. In June 1873, at the “Female Model Lodging House” in Dundee, Elizabeth McGeachy (née Nicoll) was arrested and charged with the theft of a petticoat, two bed gowns and two aprons from millworker and lodger, Eliza Brady. McGeachy was 41 years old, married, and was employed as a kitchen maid at the lodging house. She had worked in the jute mills in the past. She was illiterate and had a previous conviction for theft in 1868 at the Glasgow High Court. In her statement, McGeachy pleaded guilty and admitted that she pawned the items stolen from Brady although she had ‘no authority to do so’.<sup>92</sup> In 1882, she was again arrested for theft in Dundee.<sup>93</sup> The article “Women and Crime” suggested that, “The elderly female convict not seldom becomes a model domestic servant,” however, this was not true in Elizabeth McGeachy’s case, and the stereotype of the pathologically untrustworthy servant that aristocratic households feared so dearly was found.<sup>94</sup>

In contrast, many domestic servants in Dundee engaged in theft through necessity. As Judith Flanders argued, mistrust about thieving servants led to the strict rationing of meals and clothing. Foodstuffs and alcohol were locked away and

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<sup>90</sup> Flanders, *The Victorian House*, 102.

<sup>91</sup> “Women and Crime,” *Dundee Courier* (July 29, 1871).

<sup>92</sup> AD14/73/128, “Precognition against Elizabeth McGeachy for the crime of theft and previous conviction,” High Court of Justiciary precognitions, National Archives of Scotland.

<sup>93</sup> AD14/82/329, “Precognition against Elizabeth Nicoll for the crime of theft and previous conviction,” NAS.

<sup>94</sup> “Women and Crime,” *Dundee Courier* (July 29, 1871).

servants often had to wait for their employer's old clothes second-hand.<sup>95</sup> In 1862, Mary Ann Smith, a 27-year-old domestic servant, was living in a lodging house in Peter Street, Dundee, when she was charged with the theft of a petticoat from another female lodger. She was also illiterate, but with no previous convictions.<sup>96</sup> I argue that, being temporarily out of work, or uncomfortably underdressed, may have motivated Smith's theft suggesting desperation, rather than defiance. In 1851, the *Apprentices and Servants Act* was in place to ensure domestic servants were afforded necessary living comforts in an attempt to avoid desperation-driven crime.<sup>97</sup> Pamela Horn provided the example of Jane Wilbred, a 15-year-old orphan sent to work as a general servant in 1849. Wilbred was mistreated by her employers, Mr and Mrs Sloane, and deprived of food, clothing and basic human rights until the crime was discovered by the couple's neighbours. Horn argued that this case and others highlighted not only the need to legislate to ensure employers provided for their employees, but also the reasons behind petty theft by domestic servants in many cases.<sup>98</sup> Theft was a practical example of servant defiance, but the reasons for their crime were frequently based on the injustices of their position.

Domestic servants were also capable of taking their employers to court in another example of resistance to injustice. In May 1878, Jessie Mackay sued Peter Smith for £7 6s in the Dundee Sheriff Small Debt Court as a balance of wages for unfair dismissal from her position as a domestic servant in his Lochee residence. Mackay's employers claimed that she left the house unattended and missed her curfew of 10 o'clock at night. Mackay refuted that the only time in which she had returned as late as 10 o'clock, the house was locked, and she was forced to remain outside until two o'clock the next morning. The Sheriff awarded Jessie Mackay the case and settlement amounts.<sup>99</sup> In another case from May 1878, Bridget Hargettan took her employers, Mr and Mrs Rose of Calendar Close, Overgate, to the Dundee Small Debt Court for £5 5s in damages in relation to a slander charge. Hargettan claimed that, on the 27<sup>th</sup> April, her mistress Catherine Rose (née McKnight) had called her an "opprobrious epithet" in the presence of two other women. The Sheriff

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<sup>95</sup> Flanders, *The Victorian House*, 83.

<sup>96</sup> AD14/62/208, "Precognition against Mary Ann Smith for the crime of theft at Peter Street, Dundee," NAS.

<sup>97</sup> Horn, *The Victorian Servant*, 119-20.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 119-20.

<sup>99</sup> "Action by a Domestic Servant," *Dundee Courier* (May 15, 1878).

awarded Hargettan the charge, with an additional 8s 7d in expenses reimbursed.<sup>100</sup> These cases suggested that domestic servants in Dundee also did not hesitate to address injustice in legal terms.

### 3.3 Trade Unionism and the Reproach on ‘Servant-Galism’

I argue that the most significant example of resistance to injustice among the domestic servant population of Dundee was their trade unionism, which resulted in a counterattack based on their attempt to deviate from their prescribed role as a ‘female’. In 1872, the Dundonian domestic servants were the first group of maids to publically attempt to establish a domestic service trade union in Britain.<sup>101</sup> Nineteenth-century trade unions were considered a critical mouthpiece for worker’s rights and the majority were male-only.<sup>102</sup> During the Chartist era of the 1830s and 1840s, female workers were affected by reforms, but excluded by unions and forced to protest through other means. Elizabeth Roberts argued that workingwomen were prohibited from joining trade unions in Scotland until the 1890s, when they started a revolution *en masse*.<sup>103</sup> For the servants to act as they did in 1872 was unprecedented.

The maids had a long list of grievances and, on the 26<sup>th</sup> April 1872, they met with press reporters at the Mathers Hotel in Dundee to vocalise their demands. They wanted shorter hours, a half-holiday weekly, Sundays off fortnightly (and no cooking on the Sabbath period), a reference of the ‘character’ of mistresses to be provided before employment and a modified uniform.<sup>104</sup> The Chairwoman proposed the servants establish a union called the “The Dundee and District Domestic Servants’ Protection Association” (DDDSPA) to ensure these demands be met. A second meeting was held at the Thistle Hotel, where the backing of the ‘Amalgamated Engineers’ (the Amalgamated Society of Engineers of Dundee and Perth) was discussed. By June 1872, the Engineers’ support collapsed and the DDDSPA went no further. The Glasgow domestic service union was then the first officially established union for servants, which was subsumed into the official Domestic Workers’ Union of Great Britain and Ireland in 1910, over 30 years later.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> “Action for Slander,” *Dundee Courier* (May 15, 1878).

<sup>101</sup> The previous March, domestic servants from Perth had also met to discuss a union, but they did not ‘go public’.

<sup>102</sup> Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland*, 112-14.

<sup>103</sup> Roberts, *Women’s Work*, 50-53.

<sup>104</sup> Breitenbach, *Scottish Women: A Documentary History*, 151-53; DCL, Lamb Collection, 278 (1-4).

<sup>105</sup> Higgs, *Servants’ Stories*, 92.

The *Dundee Courier*, *Dundee Advertiser* and *People's Journal* of Dundee and Cupar were frequent commentators on the domestic servants' trade union movement. Much of the press coverage was positive toward the DDDSPA, but several articles provided an example of how women were indulged in their attempt to break out of their sphere, but only to a point.

Protests for Sundays off and a change of uniform drew particular attention. British servants were usually required to wear a lilac, blue or pink cotton dress with a white apron in the morning and a black formal dress with frilled white apron and cap in the afternoon. In Scotland, domestic servants wore the same, but their cap was known as the 'flag' (see Figure 2). This fern-shaped headdress served to mark the domestic servant as a maid. It was purely ornamental and did not protect or cover the hair.<sup>106</sup> During the Dundee meeting, servants protested against the 'degrading' headdress, but agreed to wear it if employers provided for it in their wages. *The Daily Telegraph* surmised, "A feminine love of endless chatting, and the well-known passion of servantgalism [sic] to catch up on the fashion of the time, appear to be the motives of this association," in relation to this particular demand.<sup>107</sup> Servant-galism was a term used to describe the 'impudent' behaviour of the Dundonian maids. With regards to Sundays off, the sexuality of servants was foremost on trial. One commenter concluded that, if servants were in a "bad place" that demanded much from them on a Sunday, it symbolised that they belonged to "the sluts, the slatterns, and the hussies" that had only themselves to blame for their situations.<sup>108</sup> The *Dundee Advertiser* also remarked that the DDDSPA asked for Sundays off, not to practice religion, but as "an occasion for 'stravaging'" (idling) and "love-making". The paper further that, "Mary Ann" - in order to court her sweetheart - intended to deprive the master of the house of his only weekly family meal.<sup>109</sup> These were just some examples of the prejudicial commentary motivated by the trade unionism of the maids.

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<sup>106</sup> Horn, *The Victorian Servant*, 113-14.

<sup>107</sup> DCL, Lamb Collection, 278 (1-4).

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.



Figure 2: Two domestic servants from Dundee (date unknown).<sup>110</sup>

Other examples highlighted the gendered paradigm that, if domestic servants were to engage in unionism and see through their demands, this would make life harder for the men of Dundee. A satirical article in *The Scotsman* recounted the tale of “Betsy”, a domestic servant who - through her trade unionism - obliged the master of the household to brush his own boots, fetch his own cab and open the door to visitors himself. The author suggested that the servant uprising was perhaps the best thing for Victorian men, to return them to the “early ages when princes herded their own cattle”.<sup>111</sup> This fictional anecdote concluded by reemphasising its underlying point: no matter the resistance shown by the Dundonian servants (justly or not), they were still servants, and female servants at that, which predicted limitations. In another article from the 20<sup>th</sup> May, Scottish religious reformer John Knox was mentioned as welcoming the servants’ demands for a ‘character’ of prospective mistresses and

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<sup>110</sup> University of Dundee archival image of ‘Maids in Service’ reproduced by *Dundee Women’s Trail*, accessed June 1, 2017.

<sup>111</sup> DCL, Lamb Collection, 278 (1–4).

leaving men to their own devices. The article considered this demand reminiscent of Knox's, "'Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women' in Queen MARY's time ... three centuries later, in the reign of Queen VICTORIA [capitalisation in original]".<sup>112</sup> Religious rhetoric in Scotland often encouraged women to sympathise with the plight of men and reinforced women's position as mother, wife and carer in the private sphere.

Although servants were criticised for courting on Sundays, the press commentary of 1872 also paradoxically suggested that trade unionism would be unnecessary if servants would simply marry. In relation to the DDDSPA's correspondence with the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, "The Secretaress" wrote to the *People's Journal*:

It has been mockingly suggested that we might do worse than try to get the engineers amalgamated with us matrimonially. Now, had they come forward to assist us there might have been some fear of us being captivated with their manliness; but as it is, there is no fear of any such thing ... they mean to hold back like cowards and see the weaker sex fight it out for themselves.<sup>113</sup>

In another article, addressed to the *People's Journal* by J. Robert Hamilton of Philadelphia, Hamilton implored the Dundonian servants to go to the United States, where they would earn a decent wage and, "may easily marry a fine young fellow and settle down comfortably for life," if they were clever, demure and reasonably attractive.<sup>114</sup>

I argue that this press commentary focused not only on the seemingly 'trivial' nature of the domestic servant's demands, but also their insignificance in making demands in general. David Nash and Anne-Marie Kilday noted that newspaper popular press disseminated shame and ostracism in order to marginalise areas of the community.<sup>115</sup> It was likely that the lack of support from male-run trade unions was the foremost reason that the DDDSPA was never officially established, however, I argue that these gendered press reports also curtailed the servants' efforts.

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<sup>112</sup> DCL, Lamb Collection, 278 (1–4).

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> David Nash and Anne-Marie Kilday, *Cultures of Shame: Exploring Crime and Morality in Britain 1600-1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 153.

### 3.4 The Gender Dimension of Domestic Service

I argue that the practicalities of resistance in the Dundonian domestic servant community provided empirical evidence that these women were able to unknowingly undermine the separate spheres to some extent. Nonetheless, I consider the moral and ideological impact of the separate spheres to have been explicitly noticeable to the domestic servants, in public and private, due to their prescribed role as ‘female’ and the gendered expectations this entailed. In 1901, there were 127 women to every 100 men in Dundee. Of 40,000 city-registered employees, 28,000 of these were women.<sup>116</sup> Dundee had a reputation as a ‘woman’s town’ and, taking the scale of women’s employment as an example, an idealistic separation of the spheres was an unrealistic expectation. Sociologist R.W. Connell summarised in *Gender and Power* that hypothetically ‘female’ and ‘male’ traits determined ‘sexual character’. These characteristics were constructed and defined by ‘gender roles’, which in turn created common perceptions of femininity and masculinity.<sup>117</sup> I argue that in applying these definitions on the lives of Dundonian domestic servants emphasised that traditional Victorian ‘femininity’ was demonstrated neither in their working tasks nor in their examples of resistance. Nevertheless, ‘femininity’ in the form of the female prescriptive gender role was enforced upon them to counterbalance their ability to occupy both spheres.

Newspaper commentary suggested Dundee servants took a husband instead of working as this represented the arch outcome of femininity, and the subsequent fulfilment of womanhood and motherhood. Jan Merchant argued that this mentality in practice was why domestic service had become so popular with young women in Scotland as, by choosing to work as a servant, women had ensured their position in the private sphere and would also practice skills that ensured, “the comfort of themselves and their future husbands and families.”<sup>118</sup> There was an emphasised level of gendered control in the transitions most domestic servants faced in their lifetimes: a girl under her father’s authority, a young woman under her employer’s authority and, finally, a woman under her husband’s authority.<sup>119</sup> Although a domestic servant’s employer could be a woman living alone, this woman too would have faced a similar

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<sup>116</sup> Browne and Tomlinson, “A Woman’s Town? Dundee Women on the Public Stage,” 107.

<sup>117</sup> R.W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 167.

<sup>118</sup> Merchant, “An Insurrection of Maids,” 116.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

transition to adulthood (and had perhaps been widowed). Leonore Davidoff called this continuum “full patriarchal subordination” and argued that, although all Victorian women faced this to varying degrees, domestic servants suffered it greatly as working-class workingwomen.<sup>120</sup> I argue that the reproach on servant resistance and trade unionism was not just to disarm them and disable their entering the public sphere; it was to remind them that they were women, who had specific gender roles and places in society to fulfil. Therefore, the notion that the separate spheres concept was entirely idealistic was incomplete. The ideology of ‘femininity’ as tied to the theory had a moral impact on the maids of Dundee.

### **Conclusion**

As Judith Flanders concisely summarised, “God gave his authority to man, man ruled woman, and woman ruled the house-hold, both children and servants, through the delegated authority she received from man,” and this was the reality of domestic service in Dundee.<sup>121</sup> This chapter addressed the idealistic nature of the separate spheres concept and the criticism that it had no practical bearing on the lives of women. The practical reality of domestic service in Dundee was that it was ‘unfeminine’ and involved public resistance to injustices in many forms, including trade unionism. However, with each attempt to subvert the ideologies of the ‘feminine’ by entering the public realm, the servants were met with obstacles owing to their position in society as working-class workingwomen. Therefore, the separation of the spheres was not just an idealistic concern; ideologies of the ‘female’ gender role practically affected the lives of Dundonian maids as an omnipresent reminder of their place in society.

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<sup>120</sup> Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class*, 21.

<sup>121</sup> Flanders, *The Victorian House*, 28-31.

## **Chapter 4. The Servant Paradox: Safety, Violent Crime and the Separate Spheres**

### **Introduction**

The last chapter discussed resistance by the domestic servant community of Dundee weakened by ideologies of ‘femininity’ tied to the separate spheres. The separate spheres concept was not purely an idealistic concern; it restricted the behaviour of servants in an implicit manner and ensured that they did not deviate from the private sphere. This thesis has addressed two criticisms of the separate spheres concept and will explore the third in this final chapter.

In order to confirm the moral and empirical impact of the separate spheres theory on the Dundonian domestic servants, I will prove the third criticism of the theory - that the private sphere was not safe - through practical examples of violent crime committed by and against servants. Domestic servants were vulnerable to violence due to the intimacy and contradictory lack of privacy in the working-household. Servants were made victims in the private sphere whether by members of the household, strangers, acquaintances or former partners. There was also evidence to suggest that Dundonian maids committed their own violence in the private and public spheres, ‘provoked’ crime through their impertinence and were physically able to fight back. How did these two oppositional relationships with violence fit within the matrix of the separate spheres? If the private sphere was unsafe, what did that mean for the public sphere? In what ways were the practicalities and ideologies of the separate spheres evident when applied to domestic servants and violent crime?

### **4.1 Domestic Servants and Violence in the Private Sphere**

The private sphere of the working-household was neither a sanctuary nor a safe place for domestic servants in Dundee during the nineteenth century. The working-household held possibilities for attack due to the servants’ lack of privacy and sexual education, the employer’s displeasure and the opportunistic crime of non-residents. The notion that, as domestic servants were, “hidden away in private homes rather than prominently displayed in factories,” they were safer than other working-class women

was an incomplete analysis.<sup>122</sup> As domestic servants were at times able to move around the community freely, they were open to attacks in other residences and private places, by both men and women. In an example from 1879, the *Dundee Courier* reported the assault of domestic servant Christina Dunbar Ross, by millworker Sarah Boyle, at a house in Guthrie's Close, Overgate. The paper reported that Boyle arrived at the house, where "it appeared that there had been a regular row," between herself and the resident Ann Hunter, a sacksewer.<sup>123</sup> Ross was at the household at the time and suggested Boyle leave; Boyle then, "flew at her, seized hold of her by the hair, punched her on the face, and blackened her eye."<sup>124</sup> Female millworkers of Dundee were more often involved in violence than their domestic servant counterparts and were frequently brought to trial for communal violence involving weaponry with other male and female factory workers.<sup>125</sup> Opportunist violence such as this demonstrated the vulnerability of domestic servants in other private spheres as well as their own.

The potential for attack also shadowed maids due to the intimacy and isolation of their work in the working-household.<sup>126</sup> Most domestic servants in Dundee worked alone or with one other female servant often in different quarters of the household than the residing family. Frequently, they were alone when answering the door to guests or asleep in the household, were not allowed to lock doors behind them and rarely had their own bedroom.<sup>127</sup> Anna Clark argued that, although the trope of the aristocratic master who sexually preyed on his young servant was sometimes accurate, in the nineteenth century, violence towards domestic servants was more commonly committed by perpetrators who resided outside the working-household and acted as opportunists.<sup>128</sup> An example of this in Dundee was a sensational case of domestic violence committed in the working-household. On the 19<sup>th</sup> November 1903, at 36 Argyle Street, Dundee (the home of George Anton, spirit merchant, his wife and young son) domestic servant Christina Low (née Hutton) survived having her throat slit with a razor by former partner and husband Peter Low. The couple met in 1896 while Christina was a servant and Peter was a waiter in a public house. Two years

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<sup>122</sup> Roberts, *Women's Work*, 19.

<sup>123</sup> "Dundee Police Court: Wednesday - Before Bailie Maxwell," *Dundee Courier* (August 28, 1879).

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Kilday, *Women and Violent Crime in Scotland*, 95.

<sup>126</sup> Clark, *Women's Silence, Men's Violence*, 83-84.

<sup>127</sup> Higgs, *Servants' Stories*, 46-49.

<sup>128</sup> Clark, *Women's Silence, Men's Violence*, 83-84, 107-8.

later, they married in Dundee. For several years, Peter Low drank excessively, abused Christina and pawned much of their property. Christina gave birth to the second of their two children in August 1900 and was admitted to Westgreen Asylum the following month. On release, Peter Low had lost his job and the two separated. Christina travelled to Glasgow to live with her parents and, during the winter of 1900-1, her two children died. In 1902, she returned to Dundee to again work as a domestic servant. Peter Low appeared at the Anton's three times in November 1903, demanding money. He sent Christina a letter, which claimed that he would come to her working-household again and commit suicide in front of her. Christina told her sister, who reported him to the police. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of November, Peter Low visited again to ask why police had been sent; all witness statements claimed he 'smelt of drink'. At first denied entry by parlourmaid, Julia - through Christina's insistence - the mistress of the household, Mrs Anton, told Peter to make an appointment with Christina 'at 3pm Saturday'. Peter Low then pushed past Mrs Anton, knocked over her ten-year-old son, Edwin Anton, and launched at Christina with a razor. He forced her to the ground, drew her head back and slashed her neck, but was apprehended by police before he could kill her.<sup>129</sup> This was not a romanticised abuse of master against servant, but the climax of years-long domestic violence that was played out in front of the members of Christina Low's working-household.

The safety and sanctity of the private sphere was also called into question by the violence committed by domestic servants in order to keep their positions. Infanticide was one of the most common examples of violent crime that was overwhelming perpetrated by women, who acted alone. Jeffrey Weeks argued that association between infanticide and domestic service was predictable as many servants were young, female, unmarried, poorly sexually educated, subjected to social stigma and, most significantly, governed by their occupation.<sup>130</sup> A pregnant domestic servant risked the loss of her position (if the pregnancy was discovered), adoption of her child by her employers (if she remained in the working-household, which was exceptional) or the forced removal of her child (if she was sent to a workhouse for the unemployed).<sup>131</sup> Although a violent response to unmarried motherhood, concealment

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<sup>129</sup> AD15/04/2, "Precognition against Peter Low for the crime of contravention of 10 Geo. IV, c. 38, s. 2, or intent to murder at Argyle Street, Dundee," NAS.

<sup>130</sup> Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, 211.

<sup>131</sup> Higgs, *Servants' Stories*, 46-49.

of pregnancy and subsequent infanticide was a desperate act that provided the least disruptive solution to an issue that would cost domestic servants their livelihood.

In 1863, Catherine Shepherd was charged with concealment of pregnancy. Shepherd was a domestic servant to Adam Summers, a baker residing in Hawkhill, Dundee. She worked at his residence for six months; five of which, she was “in the family way”.<sup>132</sup> In Shepherd’s statement, she alleged that she miscarried before full-term at Mr Summers’ residence and was so frightened by the incident that she kept the infant’s corpse with her in the working-household for two weeks before travelling to her father’s house in Balmerino Parish, Fife to bury the child. Two men discovered the body of the infant elsewhere in Scroggie Side, Forfar. Several witness statements provided conflicted opinions on Shepherd’s account. Fellow servant from a previous residence, 26-year-old Ann Keith, testified that Shepherd had given birth to an illegitimate child in 1860 believed to be still alive. Shepherd’s statement was also firmly contested by George Lindsay Bonnar MD, the physician who performed the post-mortem on Shepherd’s baby. Bonnar claimed the child had been born full-term and showed evidence of bruising (as though the infant had been beaten). Catherine Shepherd avoided conviction of infanticide with a concealment charge, but her innocence was firmly questioned through the course of the trial.<sup>133</sup>

Infant death, caused by battering or stabbing (as was implied in the Catherine Shepherd case), was more common in pre-modern and modern Scotland than the most common European method of asphyxiation.<sup>134</sup> This was an indication that working-class Scottish women may have suffered from poor mental health, low education, desperate economic situations and a heavy burden of shame in their communities.<sup>135</sup> The working-household provided no solution for this and domestic servants across Britain were frequently provided the manual *Married Love: A New Contribution to the Solution of Sex Difficulties* as late as 1920 in order to avoid person-to-person discussions on sexual education and the mechanics of reproduction.<sup>136</sup> Servants’ lack of privacy, poor sexual education and vulnerability to opportunistic crime contributed to attacks in the private sphere in these Dundee cases, which emphasised that the public sphere was in no way safe.

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<sup>132</sup> AD14/63/269, “Precognition against Catherine Shepherd for the crime of concealment of pregnancy (Con. 49 Geo. III, c. 14),” NAS.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Nash and Kilday, *Cultures of Shame*, 52-54.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 52-54.

<sup>136</sup> Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, 211.

## 4.2 Domestic Servants and Violence in the Public Sphere

Domestic servants in Dundee also faced violence in the public sphere due to their vulnerability as female targets, their spatial ability to occupy both spheres and the opportunistic (and often drunken) crimes of men and women. Cases of public violence often dealt with the added dimension of demonstration in front of the Dundonian community. Occupational requirements permitted domestic servants to walk around the city at their employer's request or when they had leisure time. This enabled physical and sexual assaults in the streets by members of the Dundee community and residents of the working-household that may have followed them. On the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1890, the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* reported the case of Edward Adams, who had attempted to inflict "serious mischief" upon two young domestic servants.<sup>137</sup> Adams was a labourer and resided at 121 Cowgate. It was New Years Eve and the first of the domestic servants was walking into town when Adams "sprang out" from the side of Craigie Terrace and "seized her".<sup>138</sup> The newspaper reported that the servant resisted desperately and managed to escape. Several hours later, a 'cabman' investigated a woman's scream and prevented Adams from sexually assaulting another domestic servant. Meanwhile, the first unnamed servant to be attacked had alerted the police and travelled with them to apprehend the perpetrator. In another example of sexual violence, worsened by alcohol, 16-year-old Allan Low was brought to trial at the Forfar Sheriff Court for the attempted rape of an unnamed domestic servant. The *Dundee Courier* reported that Low was a farm servant at a property in Kincaldrum, but committed the assault on the public road between Forfar and Dundee. Low pled guilty and the paper reported he was, "distinctly the worse of drink at the time and did not know what he was doing".<sup>139</sup> Due to Low's age and lack of a criminal record, the case was dismissed. In a similar case also from the *Dundee Courier*, David Black Jr. sexually assaulted domestic servant, Mary Gouk, near his father's house in Birkhill Feus in 1883. The presiding Sheriff Cheyne considered Black to have had a "sad history" with a father who abused alcohol and "did not live

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<sup>137</sup> "Outrageous Assaults on Domestic Servants," *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (January 5, 1891).

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> "Indecent Assault," *Dundee Courier* (September 28, 1899).

very harmoniously” with Black’s stepmother.<sup>140</sup> The case was dismissed with the trial meant to “serve as a warning” for Black to not reoffend.<sup>141</sup>

Other instances of violence in the public sphere happened in communal places, such as public houses and eating-houses, in front of members of the community. In one such example from Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> March 1877, labourer, John Hailey, assaulted a domestic servant, Elspeth Key, in an eating-house in Overgate. He pled guilty and was sentenced to 15 days in prison or a fine of 20s.<sup>142</sup> In another, George Sutherland, a labourer, was charged with assault against “Mary Mos-”, a domestic servant.<sup>143</sup> On 12<sup>th</sup> September 1891, Sutherland inflicted Mos- “a blow on the face” while in Murraygate.<sup>144</sup> It was not reported whether the assault took place inside a dwelling or on the street, but Murraygate was one of the main thoroughfares of the city. Sutherland pled not guilty, but was sentenced to 30 days imprisonment or a 20s fine. Domestic servants were victimised by violent crime of a physical and sexual nature in the public sphere, whether secluded or in front of an audience.

Servants also committed their own crimes in public, which were observed by the community and could lead to ostracism. David Barrie and Susan Broomhall stated that approximately three cases (from more than 20 in process) were published in Scottish newspapers from corresponding cities daily. They were usually sensational cases guaranteed to garner attention and included themes of violence, sex and alcoholism with a categorical moral undertone.<sup>145</sup> All major Dundee newspapers included a Police Court section and, between 1841 and 1851, a supplementary newspaper, the *Dundee Police Gazette or Weekly Reporter*, also published court records.<sup>146</sup> I argue that the accessibility of crime news would have spread the word not only of members of the community involved, but also of the moral wrongs committed. This was particularly evident in cases of infanticide; a secret crime made public. Jane Ann McKenzie, was arrested and imprisoned at Dundee Prison for murdering her six-week-old daughter, Johann Jane McIntosh or McKenzie, on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1905. It is insinuated that McKenzie worked at a property in Edzell, but since

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<sup>140</sup> “Assault by a Boy on a Domestic Servant,” *Dundee Courier* (May 29, 1883).

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> “To-day’s Police Court: Dundee - Before Bailie Robertson,” *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (March 19, 1877).

<sup>143</sup> “Dundee Police Court: Monday - Before Bailie Craig,” *Dundee Courier* (September 15, 1891).

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> Martin J. Wiener, *Men of Blood: Violence, Manliness, and Criminal Justice in Victorian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 7-8.

<sup>146</sup> Barrie and Broomhall, *Police Courts in Nineteenth-Century Scotland*, 10-15.

the birth of her child had been living at home with her parents. One evening after dinner, she took her daughter to a secluded section of the Westwater River and drowned her. The newspaper reported that McKenzie was found in a “half-dazed condition” and “gave a rambling statement” after a local man had found the corpse washed up on the bank.<sup>147</sup> It was further stated that the perpetrator was held in esteem “by all who knew her” and that her relatives were “quiet and respectable folk,” which I argue reemphasised a sense of betrayal, not only due to the crime, but in regard to its ramifications on the family and the community.<sup>148</sup> Domestic servants were at risk of violent crime in the public sphere and were vulnerable to attack in varying circumstances, whether the violence was secluded, in front of the community or knowledge of it spread through press commentary.

### **4.3 Violence Perpetrated and ‘Provoked’ by Domestic Servants in Both Spheres**

In the case studies above, the domestic servants of Dundee were overwhelmingly the victims of violent crimes; however, there were other cases in which the servant was noted to have ‘provoked’ or outright committed violence in both the public and the private sphere. Shani D’Cruze, Louise Jackson and Anne-Marie Kilday argued that involvement with violent crime was a tangible reality for most citizens of Scotland in the pre-modern and modern eras.<sup>149</sup> Indicted levels of violent women were noticeably higher in Scotland than elsewhere in Britain and, from 1867 onwards, women contributed as the accused party in 30% of homicide trials in Scotland.<sup>150</sup> Domestic servants in Dundee were less brazen in this sense than their millworker counterparts, who were often charged with violent crime, but they too committed violent crime. For example, in 1885, a domestic servant named Mary Keir was charged with assault after having thrown “a quantity of hot or boiling water” through the window of a washing-house in Union Place, Lochee onto the face of seven-year-old, Elizabeth Moon.<sup>151</sup> Keir was described as a ‘young woman’ and as a servant this may have meant she was as young as thirteen. It is possible Moon was the child of Keir’s employers, but I

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<sup>147</sup> “Indictment Against Young Woman,” *Dundee Evening Post* (May 3, 1905).

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> Shani D’Cruze and Louise A. Jackson, D’Cruze, *Women, Crime and Justice in England since 1660* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 19-20; Kilday, *Women and Violent Crime in Enlightenment Scotland*, 84.

<sup>150</sup> Carolyn A. Conley, “Atonement and Domestic Homicide in Late Victorian Scotland,” in *Crime, Law and Popular Culture in Europe, 1500-1900*, Richard McMahon ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), 233.

<sup>151</sup> “Alleged Serious Assault by a Domestic Servant,” *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (August 15, 1885).

argue it as more likely that this public crime was a neighbour quarrel gone wrong as the case was adjourned and no further notice of it reported.

Domestic servants in Dundee were also reported to have ‘provoked’ assault by speaking out of turn or acting in a recalcitrant manner in both spheres. Although many cases reported by Scottish newspapers were nondescript, cases in which domestic servants were supposed to have motivated an attack detailed the circumstances of this provocation. The mid-Victorian trend of “media trial by journalism” ensured that loaded coverage of Police Court cases was a priority of criminal reporting and instances of female deviance were firmly exposed and stamped out if necessary.<sup>152</sup> The *Dundee Evening Telegraph* reported that on the 17<sup>th</sup> November 1889, 15-year-old David Nicoll kicked domestic servant, Ann Bennet, in Gray Street. The perpetrator pleaded guilty, but noted that, “Bennet swore at him before he kicked her,” as explanation for the assault. He was sentenced to two days imprisonment or a fine of 5s.<sup>153</sup> Provocation was not limited to the public sphere. In a private example, the *Dundee Advertiser* reported that a ‘cripple’ woman, Margaret Hunter or Malcolm, had struck a domestic servant, referred to only as Allan, over the head and on the back with a broom handle in May 1897. Hunter, “pleaded guilty, but said she was provoked by Allan calling her names and referring to her deformity.”<sup>154</sup> In this case it was unclear whether the servant was employed by Margaret Hunter or served at a neighbouring residence.

Often many parties were involved in cases of violence including domestic servants in Dundee that might testify to the servant’s guilt. In a more complex example of ‘provocation’ in the private sphere from 1892, Michael De Felice (an Italian immigrant, who “could speak English tolerably well”) assaulted Fanny Hidcock, a domestic servant to Italian confectioner and shop-owner, Dominique Cascarino, in South Road, Lochee.<sup>155</sup> Fanny Hidcock was the sister of Mr Cascarino’s wife and was employed by the couple as a servant in their business and residence. The newspaper reported that Hidcock had worked for Michael De Felice the previous four days in Blairgowrie. Presumably, they did not get along as, on the 21<sup>st</sup> March, Mr Cascarino’s brother, De Felice, arrived at the shop in Lochee and hit Hidcock over the

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<sup>152</sup> Nash and Kilday, *Cultures of Shame*, 153-56.

<sup>153</sup> “Assault on a Female,” *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (November 21, 1889).

<sup>154</sup> “A Irate Cripple,” *Dundee Advertiser* (May 5, 1897).

<sup>155</sup> “Dundee Police Court: Tuesday - Before Bailie Ferrier,” *Dundee Courier* (March 30, 1892).

head with his walking stick.<sup>156</sup> Prior to the attack, De Felice challenged Hidcock regarding alleged ‘comments’ she had made about him. Hidcock confirmed that she had said these things, and in a rage De Felice knocked Mrs Cascarino to the floor and attacked the servant. De Felice was found guilty, but the case was dismissed with admonition.<sup>157</sup> Dundonian domestic servants were not always passive victims of violent crime; they were able and willing to commit their own crime. Moreover, they were often reported to have ‘provoked’ violence towards them by acting out against employers, acquaintances and strangers, which was discouraged by the papers.

#### **4.4 The Empirical and Moral Application of the Separate Spheres**

##### ***4.4.1 Practicality of Prosecution in the Private Sphere***

Domestic servants in Dundee were able to spatially occupy both the private and public spheres and were, therefore, vulnerable to violent crime in both instances. I argue further that domestic servants were also empirically impacted by prosecution trends in Scotland, which contributed to their inferiority before the law and within society as working-class women. The majority of convictions for public crimes by men against women were treated more severely in the nineteenth century, while crimes against women by men in the private sphere were treated more leniently or not addressed at all.<sup>158</sup>

Sexual and domestic violence frequently occurred in the private sphere, but these crimes were not perceived as punishable by the law. Private cases were considered untouchable due to the sanctity of the home and the family unit, and as Elizabeth Schneider argued regarding present day conflict, the judiciary cannot easily address gender inequality and subordination originating in the private sphere.<sup>159</sup> In Scotland, prosecution of domestic violence was particularly prone to legal ignorance. Conviction trends of ‘wife-beating’ cases in Scotland implicitly favoured men over women. As Annmarie Hughes argued, men on trial for domestic violence were given the option to pay a fine or serve a period of imprisonment (as demonstrated in several

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<sup>156</sup> “Dundee Police Court: Tuesday - Before Bailie Ferrier,” *Dundee Courier* (March 30, 1892).

<sup>157</sup> “Assault on a Female,” *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (November 21, 1889).

<sup>158</sup> Annmarie Hughes, “The ‘Non-Criminal’ Class: Wife-Beating in Scotland, c. 1800-1949,” *Crime, History and Societies* 14, no. 2 (2010): 31-32.

<sup>159</sup> Elizabeth M. Schneider, “The Violence of Privacy,” in *The Public Nature of Private Violence: The Discovery of Domestic Abuse*, Martha Albertson Fineman and Roxanne Mykitiuk eds. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 39, 41-48.

cases above). Friends and acquaintances of male perpetrators would frequently raise money for the fine in the knowledge that they may be on trial next.<sup>160</sup> Hughes argued that this prosecution trend and the reluctance of the judiciary to intervene in this type of private crime provided the impetus for serious domestic violence to continue in Scotland well into the twentieth century.<sup>161</sup> Crimes that occurred in the private sphere in a working-class household (especially between a man and woman) were not only viewed as irrelevant to the judiciary, but also as an indication of the ‘animality’ of the poor. Harsh conviction for private crime was insignificant as this violence did not “undermine” the social order, but kept working-class women marginalised in the private sphere by underlining “their social unimportance” as victims in the legal system of Scotland.<sup>162</sup>

In cases in which domestic servants were the perpetrators, prosecution trends depended on the type of crime committed. Prosecution for theft and common assault in nineteenth-century Scotland was a gender-neutral affair and Scottish women were given similar sentences to male criminals. However, in cases of infanticide and concealment of pregnancy, women faced serious conviction and public condemnation. Infanticide was an intensely private example of violent crime that had public ramifications. Nash and Kilday argued that as infanticide was viewed as a crime against the nurturing and maternal qualities of “womanhood” its occurrence was perceived as a threat to society, humanity and the female gender.<sup>163</sup> Community involvement often helped identify and charge the offending mother, which contributed to a significant level of hearsay - whether accurate or falsified - in infanticide cases. Witnesses, who testified that they heard crying, saw a bloated belly or suspected a perpetrator, were taken seriously in Scottish cases, particularly during the nineteenth century.<sup>164</sup> Moreover, as Celina Romany argued in a contemporary legal context, the “helping professions” (such as physicians and policemen) requested to provide verdict on the circumstances of infanticide are often accepted without question, despite many operating under their own prejudice or having been previously

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<sup>160</sup> Hughes, “The ‘Non-Criminal’ Class,” 40.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

<sup>162</sup> D’Cruze and Jackson, *Women, Crime and Justice*, 63.

<sup>163</sup> Nash and Kilday, *Cultures of Shame*, 48.

<sup>164</sup> Anne-Marie Kilday, “Maternal Monsters: Murdering Mothers in South-West Scotland, 1750-1815,” in *Twisted Sisters: Women, Crime and Deviance in Scotland Since 1400*, Yvonne Galloway and Rona Ferguson eds. (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2002), 161-62.

swayed by witnesses.<sup>165</sup> I argue that this may have been the case in Dundee also, viewed in part through the witness statements of Catherine Shepherd's case (though she avoided an infanticide conviction). Kilday noted that prosecution of infanticidal women in Scotland in the nineteenth century was not unlike the witch-hunts of the seventeenth century, in terms of public condemnation and the undertones of immorality.<sup>166</sup> For domestic servants in Dundee, reported cases of infanticide brought their private crime to the public sphere with the added adversity of losing their occupation if convicted. Prosecution trends in violent crimes committed against them further victimised them as unimportant in law and order.

#### ***4.4.2 Ideology of Male Entitlement in the Public Sphere***

The threat of violence by men was omnipresent in both the public and private spheres of Dundee. I argue that both spaces reinforced a sense of male entitlement to the female body, which was the product of the male-dominated nature of the public sphere. Dundee's majority female labour force gave the city its reputation as a 'women's town', and there were several cases in which the female population demonstrated their willingness to commit violent crime, but this was not to suggest that this resistance reversed their moral subjugation under 'men'.

I argued that these examples demonstrated that violence inside and outside of the working-household, whether against domestic servants or other women in Dundee, implicitly and explicitly functioned to reinforce male entitlement created by the separation of the spheres. Nancy Duncan explored violence and the separation of the spheres through a psychological lens and argued that the threat of violence was an implicit function of patriarchal society, in which men - through willing participation or lack of mediation to violence against women - marginalised the status of women and jeopardised their safety in both spheres.<sup>167</sup> Duncan disagreed that all men did this knowingly with the intention of coercing women into the private sphere.<sup>168</sup> In contrast, this was the opinion of Susan Brownmiller in her famous study *Against Our*

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<sup>165</sup> Celina Romany, "Killing 'the Angel in the House': Digging for the Political Vortex of Male Violence Against Women," in *The Public Nature of Private Violence: The Discovery of Domestic Abuse*, Martha Albertson Fineman and Roxanne Mykitiuk eds. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 286-87.

<sup>166</sup> Kilday, "Maternal Monsters: Murdering Mothers in South-West Scotland," 158.

<sup>167</sup> Nancy Duncan, "Renegotiating Gender and Sexuality in Public and Private Spaces," in *Bodyspace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*, Nancy Duncan ed. (London: Routledge, 1996), 130-32.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 130-32.

*Will*. Brownmiller determined that ideologies of male entitlement to the female body carried a moral threat for women throughout history. In particular, she argued that notions of male entitlement toward violence against women were adopted and manipulated by the separate spheres concept and contributed to the ideology that the public sphere was dangerous and the private sphere was safe for women, in an attempt “to intimidate women away from the public space”.<sup>169</sup>

This ideology of male entitlement was deconstructed and disproved by historians, such as Anna Clark, who acknowledged that the separate spheres theory was rooted in the creation and promulgation of fear, but that the threat of ‘man’ was in fact an “historical invention”.<sup>170</sup> In this sense, violence was representative not of ‘men’, but of the patriarchal culture of the public sphere. Katie Barclay furthered in the context of patriarchal domination through marriage, that if power could be legitimised then it could be viewed as authority.<sup>171</sup> Male domination over women was a feature of the separate spheres concept that was itself a creation and a demonstration of patriarchal power. I argue that domestic servants in Dundee were acutely aware of the physical threat of violence, demonstrated by the above cases and their victimisation in the public and private spheres, but that violent crime was just one threat representative of the separation of spheres. Violent crime was a tool of domination, as ‘men’ were tools of the separate spheres, from which they knowingly or unknowingly espoused the ideologies of the separate spheres and created gender disparity.

## **Conclusion**

This final chapter elaborated on the criticism that the separate sphere concept overstated the safe nature of the private sphere. The private sphere of the working-household was in no sense an exclusively safe space, with several assaults toward domestic servants and servants themselves forced to commit crimes (such as infanticide) to maintain their position. The public sphere was no safer. The public sphere was a space of equal conflict and threat posed to domestic servants by violent crime. There was some evidence to suggest that servants could be violent themselves, both in the private and public spheres, along with acting in a manner that Scottish

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<sup>169</sup> Clark, *Women’s Silence, Men’s Violence*, 2-3.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-3.

<sup>171</sup> Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power: Marriage and Patriarchy in Scotland, 1650-1850*, 5-7.

newspapers considered a 'provocation' to violence. However, violence perpetrated by domestic servants did not result in their ability to raise their position, but was in fact spread throughout the community and looked down upon. With regards to violent crime against domestic servants, their position as both working-class and workingwomen was preyed upon practically and ideologically by the separate spheres. Prosecution trends in Scotland refused to acknowledge the significance of violence in the private sphere, which reinforced the empirical application of the separation of spheres in a legal sense and the male entitlement of the public sphere morally questioned whether women were safe anywhere. The combination of the separate spheres concept and violent crime demonstrated that 'men' were not solely the issue; the issue was what men signified and how this was utilised by the framework of separate spheres.

## Conclusion

This thesis argued for the academic worth of domestic servants, and their involvement with violent crime, in Dundee between 1860 and 1910. Through the use of the separate spheres theoretical framework, the conflicts, duties and experiences of these servants were clarified in order to illustrate the peculiarities of the domestic service industry in Dundee. In the first chapter, this thesis explored the separate spheres theory in detail. After being abandoned as a competent theory, could it be appropriately applied to the situation in Dundee? Three main criticisms were outlined that related to the circumstances of the Dundonian maids. The separate spheres concept was critiqued for excluding working-class concerns, being overtly idealistic and exaggerating the 'safe' nature of the private sphere.

The second chapter addressed the first criticism and explored the backgrounds and education of both Dundonian mistress and maid. Motivated by the separation of the spheres, the Victorian ideals of 'respectability' and 'domesticity' were a heavy burden on women, from all classes, in the nineteenth century. I argued that a combination of these two principles forced mistresses and servants together into the working-household. In Dundee, this caused much conflict. Domestic service in Dundee was incomparable to the Downton Abbey-esque realities of larger Scottish cities and the English midlands. The domestic servant community was small and marginalised by a large and prosperous jute industry. Middle-class families that remained in Dundee were modest by Victorian standards and mistresses of the household were educated in domestic tasks and home management in similar institutions as their working-class servants (if they were wealthy enough to afford more than one). Although the spheres theory was criticised for ignoring the working class, I argued that domestic servants keenly experienced the separate spheres concept in *practical* terms through empirical evidence that domestic education encouraged them into an occupation in the private sphere.

The third chapter of this thesis concentrated on the second criticism of the separate spheres and provided examples in which the Dundonian servants had their resistance undermined due to their gender. Despite being the highest industry employer of women in Victorian Britain, domestic service was not a 'feminine' occupation and servants often occupied both spheres in a manner their mistresses

could not. Servant resistance to injustice ranged from suing their employers to engaging in trade unionism. Nonetheless, the newspaper commentary from the attempted establishment of the DDDSPA in 1872 demonstrated that there was no opportunity for domestic servants to forget their class or their gender, and the prescribed gender roles this entailed. I argue that the second criticism, of the separate spheres as purely idealistic, can be disproven as even though there were practical examples of resistance to injustices by domestic servants, they were pressured to act 'female' by the *ideology* of the separate spheres.

The fourth chapter tested the final criticism of the separate spheres by exploring several examples of violent crime involving domestic servants, which occurred in both spheres. Whether infanticidal, domestic, sexual or physical violence, domestic servants were implicitly and explicitly influenced by violent crime throughout their lives. In certain cases, they were the perpetrators of violent crime (for example, with infanticide and assault), but more often they were victims of violence. Cases of violent crime did not only occur in the public sphere (on the streets and in eating-houses, among other places), but frequently also in the private sphere (in the working-household, its surrounds and other residential buildings). These case studies reinforced the third criticism of the separate spheres that the private sphere was unsafe; however, by doing so reemphasised the moral and empirical threat that faced women in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century society regardless of class, gender and occupation due the *ideological* and *practical* strength of gender inequality inextricably tied to the separate spheres.

This thesis reached the conclusion that the concept of separate spheres was an ideological and practical concern in the lives of domestic servants in Dundee, for various moral and empirical reasons. It underwrote their daily lives, education, career choice, their ability to resist, their safety from violence and, most significantly, their gender, throughout the 'equipoise' of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Dundonian domestic servants were influenced by more than just class tension, by more than labour concerns, but by a complex web of gender inequality that existed in their society in the private and public spheres. This was the result of an intersection of conflict in their class, gender and occupation, created by the separate sphere theory, which used 'men' and the notion of male entitlement as a tool of domination. This thesis concludes that the separate spheres framework has significant merit when used to identify the intersectionality of gender, class and occupational inequality and has

the ability to reinvigorate itself as a tool for cultural gender analysis and reverse its branding as an ‘out-dated’ theoretical framework.

The research in this thesis confronted limitations in primary source material and adequate theoretical support. Newspaper reporting of violent crime committed by or perpetrated against domestic servants in Dundee provided the bulk of case studies for analysis. The information therein was sufficient, but only included basic details of the trial. I attempted to ratify several names reported by Dundee newspapers in electoral registers and directories held by the Dundee Central Library to varying degrees of success. Neither could I confirm trial details of the Police Court trials reported in Dundee newspapers, as records for the period 1860 to 1910 no longer exist. This meant speculating to a greater degree than was necessary with the precognition cases (which included much information), although context does not guarantee a full picture. This thesis also lacked in individual primary source material in terms of servants’ correspondence. There was no material held by the Dundee City Archives or Dundee Central Library and, as the servant population of Dundee was so modest, it is unlikely that much material exists. However, methods (such as crowdsourcing) could be used to gather personal paraphernalia from family archives in future.

In terms of secondary sources, several historians and sociologists have written on themes of domestic service and violence. Few, however, combined these themes with the separate spheres framework. Those who did, such as Leonore Davidoff (in the case of domestic service narratives without violence) used the spheres theory to argue these women as members of the labour force, and as workingwomen, with the corresponding gender roles that this entailed. This perspective was helpful to gain an understanding of domestic service as a nineteenth-century ‘women’s occupation’; however, it was difficult to steer from this type of socio-economic historical inquiry to one rooted in cultural history. I attempted this by developing upon the complexities of class, gender and occupation as they related to each other in Dundee and, with the application of violence, how they related to the premise of the public sphere as ‘unsafe’ and representative of the patriarchy, in itself created by the separate spheres theory. Despite limitations, the arguments throughout this thesis reinforced the importance of gender in practical scenarios of crime and conflict and stimulated further questions to be asked.

There are several ways in which the themes of this thesis could be extended in further research. The analysis of Dundee between 1860 and 1910 provided a very particular picture of domestic service in Scotland. Although servant communities in other localities, for example, Glasgow and Edinburgh, dealt with similar issues (such as conflicted relationships with mistresses and vulnerability to violence), the ‘community’ makeup was constructed differently to that of Dundee. This may provide an interesting, but problematic, comparison due to the much larger populations (of not only servants). Fitting comparisons and contrasts leading to a contextualised understanding of the lives of domestic servants in Scotland may be feasible by comparing small regions of cities. For example, Broughty Ferry in Dundee was a seaside area that accommodated most of the ‘traditional’ Victorian middle-class families. Portobello in Edinburgh was another nineteenth-century seaside town represented by the middle and upper classes. Servant owning registers could be used to compare employment, electoral roles to confirm household ownership and further information processed from there to undertake a quantitative comparison. To qualify the historical significance of the ‘servants stories’ of these regions, newspapers, court records and archival material could again be surveyed, along with possible crowd sourcing for information from current residents.

Another way to approach the research in this thesis further would be to alter the theoretical framework. In 1976, Elizabeth Pleck acknowledged that a study of working-class women in employment in any city related to histories of gender, labour, class and urbanism, among other disciplines. Cultural-historical research on domestic servants and violence in Scotland could therefore divide into endless theoretical approaches. Two in particular, which would find themselves easily incorporated to the subject matter of this thesis are Mary Douglas’ conception of ‘filth’ from *Purity and Danger* and Michel Foucault’s disciplinary/surveillance power dynamic from *Discipline and Punish*. Mary Douglas’ research on ‘filth’ as external to the body and representative of immorality, danger and inferiority could be useful in a study of domestic service, and even of violence (especially if it involved the ‘effusion of blood’). The use of Douglas’ framework on domestic service histories is common; studies, such as Phyllis Palmer’s *Domesticity and Dirt: Housewives and Domestic Servants in the United States, 1920-1945* (1991) relied on it heavily. Its application on specific cases outlined in this thesis would add to arguments that were touched upon

with the definition of 'unfeminine' in Chapter 3. Such as, to what extent did their dirty tasks reflect their dirtiness (physical, spiritual and sexual) in the eyes of some their employers and society at large? Foucault's conception of power as a corrective tool wielded by humans, rather than impersonal structures and ideologies, is another possible source of further study. This approach would look at discursive representations rather than gendered experience. It may be particularly interesting to consider further the notion that domestic servants were disciplined and surveyed by their mistresses, who were disciplined by their husbands and surveyed by other women of the same class, who were disciplined and surveyed by those of a higher class and so on. This perspective highlights the inequality of servant life as less based on systematic degradation of women under men, but more on the transient relationships between power and authority (which, in the nineteenth century, just so happened to be men over women). I hope to have delivered the same conclusion in Chapter 4 based on my own argumentation that the separate spheres opportunistically created a male dominated landscape - not from the natural domination of men - but from inherent threat of entitlement and what 'men' stood for. Due to the limited scope and size of this thesis, I cautiously chose to omit Douglas' cultural anthropological and Foucault's power theory perspectives to focus on arguing the worth of the separate spheres, but these would be interesting points to consider in future.

This thesis has managed to cover several decades of Scottish history and many aspects of the lives of domestic servants by remaining within the seemingly simplistic theoretical framework of separate spheres. The binary oppositions present in this concept easily highlight peculiarities in the Dundee situation. Moreover, the three main criticisms forced questions to be asked about the combination of gender, class and occupation that may have been irrelevant to other frameworks. Instances of violence and conflict involving domestic servants demonstrated that their position in Victorian society was not clean-cut, but was morally and empirically influenced by the fact that they were women. The notion of the public as dangerous and the private as safe for women was incomplete and the threat of violence (not just by men) and of domination was omnipresent in both the public and the private realms. I think most telling about the practical and ideological application of separate spheres on the domestic servants of Dundee, was that it was not always explicit. It existed to remind them of their position in society as women, but in several roundabout ways. For

example, by influencing their school education to get them into an occupation in which they could be easily controlled from the very beginning. These women were doubtless distracted by more 'important' matters in daily life than notions of gender inequality, such as the threat of violence, or issues as superficial as a ripped skirt or the repair of a sweeping brush. Gender disparity may not have been an explicit concern of domestic servants in Scotland. Nevertheless, I argue that it was there, and the separate spheres affected them, ideologically and practically, in more ways than they realised.

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