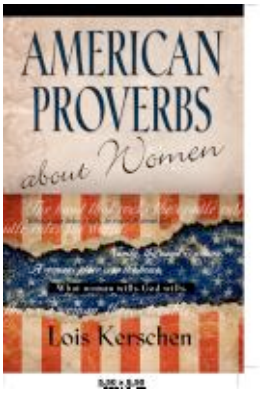
AMERICAN PROVERBS about Women

Lois Kerschen



American Proverbs About Women *is an examination of how women are treated by these popular sayings that perpetuate folk wisdom. While some are true-to-life, some are saccharine, and some are demeaning, condescending, and even violent towards women. Readers will be entertained yet disturbed as they assess the impact of these proverbs on our cultural perspective. Over 800 proverbs are categorized by type and identified according to states or countries and dates of origin.*

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by

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INTRODUCTION

The title of this work, "American Proverbs about Women," while seemingly simple, actually requires the discussion of a number of different areas in order to be understood. Before a collection of American proverbs about women can be presented, the broader category of folklore must be examined in terms of what it is and its historical relationship to women. Than it can be determined how proverbs are unique among folklore genres in their impact. From there, what is American and how American proverbs view women can be identified.

First of all, the subject of folklore as a whole should be considered. Often called the "voice of the folk," folklore is an oral tradition in songs, stories, myths, legends, riddles, rhymes, jokes, games, sayings and more, but it is also dances, crafts, epitaphs and the like. Folklore is the customs, beliefs and practices of a people and, therefore, an expression of its culture. Jan Harold Brunvand, in The Study of American Folklore, said that folklore reveals "the common life of the human mind apart from what is contained in the formal records of culture that compose the heritage of a people."[1] As a result, folklore is an important indicator of a people's way of life and attitudes.

Until recent times, the study of folklore has largely excluded women. Whether this neglect resulted from the preponderance of male folklorists and anthropologists who failed to be sensitive to the possibility of another viewpoint or from the less personal but more pervasive bias of a male-dominated world, the consequence has been an invisibility of women in the picture of civilization's progress. Although the Journal of American Folklore published a bibliography of women's folklore already in 1888, folklore scholarship pertaining to women has been minimal and, except for the areas of midwifery, charms and some games, customs and beliefs (Premier folklorist

[1] Jan Harold Brunvand, The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co. Inc., 1978), 1.

Archer Taylor said, "If it could be seen from the kitchen window, it was woman's domain."[2]), women were not consulted by folklore field workers unless a male storyteller was unavailable. Consequently, a woman's unique form of expression and women's folk specialties, such as needlework and weaving, were left almost unrecorded until recent times. Now, however, with the rise of feminism, the search has commenced to find women's contributions in history and thereby give them their appropriate place.

Studies show not only how women have contributed, but also how they have been perceived through the ages. One of the functions of folklore is that of propaganda, as folklore is the perpetuation of tradition. The stories, proverbs, and other forms are a legacy of the customs, beliefs and practices of one generation to the next. They are the embodiment of a way of life and all that it entails in terms of lessons and morals. Consequently, folklore stereotypes and presents roles in traditional forms for easy transmission. For Americans, this stereotyping has expressed itself both blatantly and subtly as patriarchy.

In his chapter "The Crowing Hen and the Easter Bunny: Male Chauvinism in American Folklore" noted folklore author Alan Dundes has provided the material for the following paraphrased list of American folklore characteristics concerning male-female images:

1. Boys are discussed first and discussed in terms of strength and largeness.
2. Girls are associated with sweet foodstuff, smallness, and a plaything nature.
3. Domestic servitude as in homemaking and housekeeping is defined for women.
4. Women are passive.
5. Women are expected to marry. The penalty for not doing so is to be the butt of cruel sayings and games about old maids.

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[2] Claire R. Farrer, "Women and Folklore: Images and Genres," Journal of American Folklore 88 (Jan.-Mar. 1975): xi.

6. The female path is that of love, marriage, and childbearing, not in careers like doctor, lawyer, Indian chief.

7. The female path does not include running amuck in Cupid's garden. Sex is a male prerogative maintained rigidly by a double standard. Women are victims of a man's right to sex. Boys sow wild oats while "nice girls blush."

8. Women are told what they should do, which is act like women, and what they should not do, which is act like men; thus, the negative reactions to "tomboys" and "whistling girls."

9. Males are procreatively independent. The female procreative role is usurped by Santa, the stork, the Easter bunny and others, thus limiting female activity.[3]

Exposing male chauvinism in most of folklore is a long process when one considers stories, legends, myths, songs, rhymes and games. But the short pithy expressions that are proverbs make them easier to study as a group since their collection, while tedious, does not, however, require as much space as the other genres of folklore. Fortunately, the nature of proverbs is such that, while they are brief, they are perhaps the best indicators of attitudes and beliefs of any of the forms of folklore. Therefore, if one wants to explore the historical image of women in oral tradition, proverbs are an ideal subject.

Proverbs are difficult to define. While much has been written on what a proverb is, it is more important to understand what a proverb does. A proverb is a short homely statement that teaches a lesson or gives practical advice. There is generally a matter of rhyme and meter to consider and a binary structure that presents a problem in the first half and solves it in the second half. Usually, proverbs contain humor, but that humor, particularly when the subject is women, can be bitter, satirical, even macabre. Besides these typical proverbs, there are proverbial comparisons (As fussy as an old maid) which have a fixed traditional form but contain no moral advice; proverbial phrases (To

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3 Alan Dundes, "The Crowing Hen and the Easter Bunny: Male Chauvinism in American Folklore," Interpreting Folklore (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 161-165, 170.

smell like a whorehouse on Saturday night) which permit variations in person, number and tense; proverbial similes (A man without a wife is like a fork without a knife); and proverbial metaphors (A widow is a boat without a rudder). All of these forms capsulize an everyday experience, both of the originator of the proverb and of the one who uses it.

Concerning origins, those to whom credit is given for coining certain proverbs are probably still not the authors. Proverbs have been documented back to the time of Aristotle and Plato and can be found as rules of conduct in the most primitive societies. It is this latter fact that leads us into consideration of the importance of proverbs, of their function within a culture.

"Proverbs being drawn from the experiences and study of a people's lives are among the most accurate index of that people's life and thought. They may not be true or represent truth, but they indicate what the people hold to as their rules and ideals of life and conduct." So wrote Joyce Hertzler in "The Social Wisdom of the Primitives with Special Reference to Their Proverbs." Hertzler concluded that proverbs more accurately represent a people's rules and ideals than their religious or ethical systems.[4] Appropriately published in a periodical entitled Social Forces, these remarks by Hertzler strongly make the point that proverbs are not just fun retorts, but are an important medium for teaching and learning. Yet, there are no high moral ideas expressed in proverbs, only practical ways to survive in the real world.

Further proof of the impact of proverbs can be found in what Charlotte Sophia Burne wrote in The Handbook of Folklore: "The morality of a people, what they think is good or evil, what they advise and what they condemn, who is respectable and whose conduct is unacceptable, this can be found in their proverbs and popular sayings."[5] While Hertzler thought that modern society should be too

[4] Joyce Hertzler, "The Social Wisdom of the Primitives with Special Reference to Their Proverbs," Social Forces 11 (1933): 315.

complex for proverbs because our problems are not so simple that they can be covered by a pat saying, what should be and what is are once again in conflict. Admittedly, Hertzler was correct when she said that proverbs "take away the necessity of individual generalization and explanation. They reduce the demand for accurate observation and analysis, and correct expression. Those who use proverbs extensively have their thoughts both guided and confined by them."[6] Therefore, Hertzler concluded, educated people do not need them and to use proverbs is to return to the primitive, illiterate state. Nonetheless, don't people, even the best educated, tend to reach for their grab bag of clichés rather than think of something original to say when a response is required?

Proverbs provide, then, an ease of communication. They are handed down as useful "saws," tried and, people are told, true expressions that can handle any situation. Such verbal tools have long been popular and continue to be so. During the height of their popularity in the 1600's and 1700's when many collections were made, proverbs were considered not the resource of the primitive and illiterate, but "dear to the true intellectual aristocracy of a nation."[7] This latter judgment was made in 1859 by Richard Chenevix Trench, Archbishop of Dublin, who worried in his book, Proverbs and their Lessons, that people are "very little conscious of the amusement, instruction, insight, which they are capable of yielding."[8] Apparently, American authors were aware of the weight of proverbs because, in the period of 1820-1880, proverbs abound in American literature. That is why Archer Taylor and Bartlett Jere Whiting chose 1820-1880 as the years to study for their Dictionary of American Proverbs and

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[5]Charlotte Sophia Burne, The Handbook of Folklore (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, Ltd., 1914), 280.

[6] Hertzler, 317.

[7] Richard Chenevix Trench, Proverbs and their Lessons (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1905), 11.

[8] Trench, 9-10.

Proverbial Phrases for "at no other time have so many American writers made proverbs so obvious an ingredient in their style."[9]

Sixty years after this literary era of heavy proverbial use, Roger L. Welsch wrote in A Treasury of Nebraska Pioneer Folklore that proverbs were as common then as three generations before. Welsch found it astonishing how frequently proverbs appeared in everyday conversation: "When someone wants to make a comparison, or needs to prove a point, or sees a red sunset, time and again he [sic] will find himself [sic] phrasing his [sic] comments in terms of a folk saying, proverb or prophecy."[10]

Because of this widespread knowledge and dissemination of proverbs and their importance as indicators of societal norms, modern psychologists use proverbs as part of their diagnostic testing material. Proverbs have been used to test for personality traits, attitude, schizophrenia, depression, abstracting function, cerebral disease, and cognition.

Psychologists should not be the only ones to use proverbs to gain insight into the human mind. For example, for anthropologists and sociologists, proverbs can be seen as a tool of the patriarchy established at the beginning of humanity when the caveman's physical prowess, essential to survival as a hunter and protector, caused him to think that he was superior to the cavewoman. Through the centuries, this preference for brawn instead of brain has given the world a violent history and a patriarchy which codified male dominance into law from the Bible to the Napoleonic Code. As part of the process, the proverb has been used to translate this biased law into lay terms.

For the folklorist, the student of literature, and the linguist interested in the ethnic and sexist bias of language, the proverb can also provide many answers. One is what one says, so our language

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[9] Archer Taylor and Bartlett Jere Whiting, A Dictionary of American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases, 1820-1880 (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958), viii.

[10] Roger L. Welsch, A Treasury of Nebraska Pioneer Folklore (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1941), 266.

trains us and betrays us. Peter Seitel, in "Proverbs: A Social Use of Metaphor," said that, for folklorists, the study of proverbs can be as

> white rats are to experimental psychologists and as kinship terms are to cultural anthropologists. . . . By pushing around these small and apparently simply constructed items, one can discover principles which give order to a wider range of phenomena. Proverbs are the simplest of the metaphorical genres of folklore . . . and the genre which clearly and directly is used to serve a social purpose.[11]

What Seitel is indicating is that, through the study of proverbs, one can understand the more complex genres of folklore and gain significant insight into the social purposes that literature of all kinds may serve. Despite being a relatively simple application of metaphor, since proverbs are, according to Seitel, the "most sensitive to social context,"[12] if one can master the numerous and complex social rules to use and interpret proverbs, then the rest is easy.

The worthwhile pursuit of studying proverbs, then, can determine whether or not ancient ideals influence current American thought. If so, then the question becomes: Are these positive or relevant influences? The investigation of the origins of proverbs may reveal prejudices and mores that are no longer congruent with our modern mentality and therefore should be gleaned from our teachings. Joseph Raymond's article "Tension in Proverbs" illustrates this problem. Raymond added to the proverb's definition as a vivid expression of group mind, memory, and feelings, the elements of volition and tension. He pointed out that certain groups are "proverbially rejected for economic, ethnic, religious, regional or other reasons" [including gender] and that these groups constitute significant material for social study. Raymond noted that derogatory statements frequently are in proverb form and that some proverbial phrases may be clues to historical tensions whose currency, extensiveness, weighting in the

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[11] Peter Seitel, "Proverbs: A Social Use of Metaphor," in Folklore Genres, Dan Ben-Amos, ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), 140.

[12] Seitel, 141.

culture, and contextual definition would have to be established before tentative conclusions could be drawn as to types of existing tensions. When such phrases are particularly pungent, they may outlast the circumstances which popularized them.[13]

This book will expose some of the existing tensions in American proverbs about women and suggest that some of these proverbs have outlasted the circumstances which popularized them. In the process, we should note Alan Dundes' reminder that we cannot censor folklore, for we must treat the disease of prejudice, not the symptoms. However, we must also point out the symptoms as often as possible. Since "the male bias in American culture is not just reflected passively in American folklore" but is "actively transmitted to each new generation of Americans, often unconsciously or unselfconsciously through folkloristic means," then by making the unconscious or unselfconscious conscious, we may raise levels of consciousness. We cannot stop folklore, but we can hold it up to the light of reason and through the unrivaled picture it provides, we may better see what wrongs need righting.[14]

While the majority of proverbs are sexless in subject, those that deal with women tend to fall into certain patterns, and the collection which follows will divide the proverbs into these categories. Generally speaking, proverbs about women are characterized by biting wit and bitter complaints. While some proverbs are the saccharine, "up on a pedestal" kind (God couldn't be everywhere; therefore, He made mothers), the majority portray woman as a sharp-tongued, long-winded, empty-headed, toy-like creature who is faithless to the man by whom she should be ruled and to whom she belongs like property or livestock.

Proverbs stereotype without shame, yet contradict each other constantly. For every proverb that promotes the submissiveness of

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[13] Joseph Raymond, "Tension in Proverbs: More Light on International Understanding," Western Folklore 15 (1956): 155-156.

[14] Dundes, 160, 175.

women, there is another that admits that women will not always accept a subordinate position but will find a way around it.

> However, the very existence of such contradictory statements about women indicates that what they say and do has had some impact on how men run their lives. Women's activities cannot be easily forecast, men complain. Women cannot be totally ignored even if (or especially because) their behavior often seems to men to be idiosyncratic and illogical rather than carefully planned.[15]

So adds Cheris Kramarae in Women and Men Speaking. The problem here might be that women will, of course, appear to be bizarre and confusing if their roles are defined on the basis of men's attitudes. Woman, as an aberration in a man's world, constitutes a separate category for proverbs, while there is not a similar set of sayings about men, since everything is observed from their point of view. There need not be proverbs which chide subtle assumptions of power by men because their authority is obvious and considered natural.

Logic suggests that women have seldom originated proverbs since men have historically dominated literature and society. Supporting this theory is evidence from a related case. Archer Taylor remarked in The Proverb that the Wellerism, a cousin to the proverb that incongruously combines a sober assertion with an utterly inappropriate scene (Everyone to his own taste, as the old lady said when she kissed the cow), displays a freedom and scant respect "toward women, particularly old women," which shows that "the form is a masculine invention in which women have had little share."[16]

What we know of the power of language also suggests that men have used every form of expression to vent their fears, jealousies, and misconceptions about women. Tristram Coffin, a leading folklorist,

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[15] Cheris Kramarae, Women and Men Speaking: Frameworks for Analysis (Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers, Inc., 1981), 122.

[16] Archer Taylor, The Proverb and Index to the Proverb (Hatboro, PA: Folklore Associates, 1962), 217.

commented in his book, Our Living Traditions: An Introduction to American Folklore, about this retribution:

> One of the richest sources of proverbs is [a] man's fears and hatreds of his fellow man, his xenophobia. [A] Man is always willing, even eager, to characterize, deride, spoof his fellow man, especially if in doing so he thinks he is raising himself in the eyes of the world or in his own. In such proverbs there are of course numerous examples of [a] man's earliest objects of derision, women−anti-feminism, fear and hatred of women, especially wives.[17]

The problem with this behavior is that such speech, disguised as "the wisdom of many, the wit of one" (the traditional definition of a proverb), buys its wit and retribution at the expense of others. Besides the moral, there is the consequence to consider. The quick repartee may not seem to matter much at first glance, but, as pointed out many times, folklore is much more than the recording of quaint customs−it is a perpetuator of attitudes and values. As a living organism permeating American life, folklore is accepted without thought just as any other form of propaganda. Subliminal cuts are dangerous: so short and unobtrusive that they slip into our subconscious and program our thinking without our ever knowing the source. After all, how many times can one hear "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned" before one believes that women truly are vicious and vindictive? Like so many matters of faith or status quo, one does not question but simply accepts that that is just the way it is.

The very familiarity of proverbs begs acceptance and trust, but folklore scholars today are questioning the appropriateness of the proverbs' messages. The recent interest in women's issues has prompted an examination of the treatment of women by folklore and, in the case of this book, particularly by proverbs. The attitude toward women, shared by both men and women, may have been formed by proverbs which has resulted in men maintaining superiority and

[17] Tristram Potter Coffin, ed., Our Living Traditions (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 201.

women accepting subordination and ridicule, despite modern enlightenment. The confusion that results has been a primary topic of American society for the last half century. It is reasoned that women are capable enough to be business leaders, for example, yet women's salaries fall far below men's and a glass ceiling keeps women out of high-level positions.

It is appropriate at this point to review the importance of examining proverbs for the purpose of determining their influence on the status of women. In "Problems in the Study of Proverbs," Archer Taylor drives home some important thoughts about how the historical and stylistic investigation of proverbs, and therewith of cultural roots, exposes current values. Chance did not determine the course of history. Powerful influences have shaped world events and are reflected in the development of a phrase. Thus, a "simple turn of speech lets us view civilization from a mountain peak." Value, however, comes only from interpreting the facts to meet our cultural needs or to feed our spirits. The interpretation may be in terms of history, cultural history, aesthetic standards, or, in short, any social activity. The fact is necessary and equally so the interpretation.[18]

If what proverbs teach isn't examined to find what Americans really believe, the culture will continue to harbor resentment, misunderstanding, and prejudice concerning women. Thus the battle of the sexes will rage on with no victors, only victims.

Background Study

Since publications rather than field work were used for the sources of the proverbs in this work, a review of proverb collections was, of course, necessary. In the following chapter, these collections will be discussed. Besides the proverbs themselves, though, it was necessary to review many other works about folklore and the study of proverbs in order to understand the field and the particular area of concern about women.

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[18] Archer Taylor, "Problems in the Study of Proverbs," Journal of American Folklore 47 (1934): 21.

Jan Harold Brunvand's The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction provided the definitions used and a beginning bibliography. Richard M. Dorson's American Folklore provided the following food for thought while searching for supporting material for the working premise about women and American proverbs: Folklore is linked to nationalistic pride and can be used as propaganda; American folklore must be seen against the background of American history; American folklore is a blend of European and Native American; There are three themes for American folklore: land, savages, and hazards of life; and, The proverb is the very "bone and sinew" of the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect.[19]

Similarly, Kaarle Krohn's Folklore Methodology teaches that: A proverb is a prediction based on true experience that has attained a crystallized form, i.e., crystallizing life's experiences; "The true proverb . . . frequently contains a concept that gives color and life to the linguistic expression of the idea"; and, according to Fr. Seiler in Das deutsche Sprichwort (Strassburg, 1918, p. 8), "In the creation of a proverb, just as in the fashioning of a single word or expression. the folk exercise not a creative but rather a selective function."[20]

Besides American Folklore, Dorson wrote Folklore and Folklife in which he said: "Proverbs are one of the most easily observed and collected genres of traditional expression, yet one of the least understood. This misunderstanding is due, perhaps, to their very familiarity." Dorson provided some discussion of the long history of proverb collections in print and said that "In fact, many of the earliest and most popular of books were collections of proverbs, the most notable being Erasmus's best seller of the early Renaissance, the Copia." He added that proverb collecting has primarily been done in encyclopedic form "and with a great deal of borrowing from one compilation to the next."[21] This last bit of information is certainly true

[19] Richard M. Dorson, American Folklore (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1959), 3, 5, 7, 9, 78.

[20]Kaarle Krohn, Folklore Mythology, trans. Roger L. Welsch (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 23, 24, 25.

[21] Richard M. Dorson, ed., Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction

and this repetition can be seen in the index where one proverb may have several sources cited.

Many of the books and articles on folklore and proverbs consulted gave valuable definitions of a proverb (the lengthy explanation of proverbs and related forms in the Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend edited by Maria Leach is excellent). But verification of the power and influence of a proverb, and justification of the project and the belief that proverbs can influence attitudes, was also sought. Support was found in a premier authority on proverbs, Archer Taylor, who said in "Problems in the Study of Proverbs" that through proverbs "We are led very directly to estimate the worth of different manners of expression and to perceive currents of ideas−ethical, political, scientific, or aesthetic−in the history of humanity." He added: "The survey of the origin and dissemination of a proverb, the critical and appreciative judgment of its various forms, the examination of the way it has been used, or the interpretation of a misunderstood proverb are tasks which repay amply the comparatively slight effort needed to accomplish them."[22]

Donald R. Gorham's "A Proverbs Test for Clinical and Experimental Use" which said that "proverbs have long been used as an index of intellectual functioning," (e.g., the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale)[23] and "Use of Meaningless and Novel Proverbs as a Projective Technique" by Larry W. Bailey and Darrel Edwards both provided evidence of the psychological impact of proverbs. In fact, the latter said that

> Proverbs have been used for many years and in widely dispersed cultures as a means of conveying basic truths which have emerged from man's experience. Proverbs characteristically involve an element of interest and intrigue, symbolism, and general application of principle. Because of this figurativeness

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(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 117-118.

[22] Taylor, Problems, 1, 10.

[23] Donald R. Gorham, "A Proverbs Test for Clinical and Experimental Use," Psychological Reports 2 (1956): 1.

> and lack of specificity of concepts, translation and application of the proverb are left to the interpreter. Thus, proverbs have frequently been used to assess abstract thinking, level of verbal life in many instances the interpreter will project his needs, attitudes and conflicts into his responses.[24]

One of the greatest aids to this project was American Proverb Literature: A Bibliography compiled by Francis A. DeCaro and W. K. McNeil. This annotated bibliography saved many hours of searching for sources and guides by providing not only a list of works in folklore, but also a critique of their value. Sometimes just the note on the work was enough to determine its value in connection with the subject of this book and to stimulate further thought on it. For example, concerning Alexander H. Krappe's chapter on proverbs in The Science of Folklore they wrote:

> This chapter notes certain problems encountered in dealing with proverbs. [e.g.] The fact that contradictory proverbs can be found in the same culture is accounted for by the fact that common sense as a whole warns against all excesses or extremes. . . . This last proposition of Krappe is an interesting one, but it would seem that contradictory proverbs can be accounted for without resorting to the mystique of a sort of collective folk mind which in the end puts all into harmony.[25]

The length of the bibliography is an indication of the extent of the research done into the discussion of proverbs by folklorists. It was necessary, of course, to find out if anyone else had approached American proverbs from the angle of their treatment of women or had studied other elements of folklore in such terms. Support was found for the premise of this book, but nothing else was found exactly like this work. In fact, discussions with researchers at two of the largest

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[24] Larry W. Bailey and Darrel Edwards, "Use of Meaningless and Novel Proverbs as a Projective Technique," Journal of Personality Assessment 37 (1973): 527.

[25] Francis A. DeCaro and W. K. McNeil, compilers, American Proverb Literature: A Bibliography, Bibliographic and Special Series, No. 6 (Bloomington, IN: Folklore Forum, 1970), 5.

women's studies centers in the nation, the Henry A. Murray Research Center at Radcliffe College of Harvard University and the National Women's Studies Association at the University of Maryland, revealed that they had no knowledge of anything similar to this work.

T. F. Thiselton-Dyer's Folklore of Women, published in Chicago in 1906, is on the same topic, but it contains proverbs from all over the world. The discussion in this book is mostly historical, but because of that aspect, it was possible to identify the origins of many proverbs about women and to get explanations of their meanings.

There are four books on the market that are vaguely similar in nature to this work. The Monstrous Regiment by Margaret Blackwood is a book of aphorisms about women published in England in 1990. The book is divided into categories much like this one, and the sayings from various famous people throughout history are also very revealing of attitudes toward women.

An Uncommon Scold by Abby Adams contains 1,000 quotes from famous women. This book is also divided into categories, i.e., topics about which women have expressed their views through the centuries, but there is only one section on the subject of women themselves. Another book quoting women is Wit and Wisdom of Famous American Women edited by Evelyn L. Beilenson and Ann L. Tenenbaum. This very small book (the others were not large by any means) is restricted to an American focus, like this work, but is divided according to the occupations of the women quoted. Finally, there is another very small book Momilies: As My Mother Used to Say . . . by Michele Slung. This best seller is a collection of the things that mothers say with pictures of mothers of many famous people.

While these four books are also concerned with women and sayings, none are collections of proverbs and little is actually said about the impact of language on society as it deals with women. Among the proverb collections, almost all are general in nature. They have women, daughters, wives, etc. as subject headings, but there is no gathering of these related groups for the purpose of discussing traits or trends, impact or significance. Nearly all the collections have some discussion in their prefaces concerning the nature of proverbs,

their structure, popularity, history, and international similarities, but it is rare to find any detailed analysis of a select group of proverbs.

Articles about proverbs usually present the latest collections from a particular area of the country. Although dozens were reviewed, not many of these articles actually contributed new proverbs to this collection since they could be about any topic and didn't often have one that concerned women. It must be remembered that, out of the thousands of proverbs that have been recorded, those about women are a relatively small percentage even if they are in the hundreds.

Because of the aforementioned general nature of proverb collections and the lack of discussion about the impact of the proverbs as part of our language, it was necessary to look at the arena of linguistics to get reinforcement of the idea that language is a powerful tool and that any given segment of language can have a key influence on a culture and its thought patterns. The link to linguistics was, of course, the study of sexist language. Proverbs about women are a worry because they appear to be laden with sexism. So, as a part of language, proverbs about women are, in particular, a part of sexist language just as much as the generic pronoun. The following is a quick overview of what was found to be useful from the world of linguistics.

There were a multitude of books and articles about sexism in language to call upon, but most, notably the works of Deborah Tannen, dealt with the way women speak, the way women are spoken to, interactions in conversation between the sexes, word endings like "ette" and "ess," negative connotations for "feminine" traits while "masculine" descriptions are positive, and other well-known topics in the discussion of sexist language. Nonetheless, the point was made by many researchers that language in all its forms of usage has a definite influence on a society's thinking. The argument was the same in linguistics as it is in folklore: how much does language affect a culture versus how much does a culture affect the language?

"Determinism" is a school of thought championed among linguists by Dale Spender who wrote Man Made Language in 1980. According to Deborah Cameron in Feminism and Linguistic Theory,

Dale Spender and other feminist writers, by the end of the 1970's, were proponents of the theory that language strongly affects and maybe even determines one's view of the world. Cameron herself discussed the "images" that are imprinted on our minds about women from representations in beauty pageants, advertising, literature, children's books and so on.[26] If the representation of women in these images is of concern, why not also how women are represented in proverbs?

Women and Language in Literature and Society, edited by Sally McConell-Ginet, Ruth Borker and Nelly Furman, provided some interesting selections that dealt not only with parts of the language, but also with the force of language as a whole in teaching women about their place. In their introduction, the editors said that research suggests the importance of linguistic *processes* in connecting individual human minds in the important issue of how product and process, language one another.[27] Continuing this line of thought, Philip M. Smith said in Language, The Sexes and Society that "There is more to this domain of activity than the interest in language as a social telltale, however. This is the concern that language, as a major vehicle for the transmission of beliefs and values of society, may profoundly affect female-male relations."[28]

If this effect exists, can it be seen in everyday life, for example, in the workplace? Probably so, but studies to verify proverb use in the home or the office or in social situations are virtually nonexistent. Neal R. Norrick in How Proverbs Mean: Semantic Studies in English Proverbs reported that "Recordings and/or transcriptions of naturally occurring dialogue have been practically. . . . a systematic investigation of proverbs in free conversation would require more

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[26] Deborah Cameron, Feminism and Linguistic Theory (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992, c1985), 5-6.

[27] Sally McConnell-Ginet, Ruth Borker, and Nelly Furman, eds., Women and Language in Literature and Society (New York: Praeger, 1980), 5.

[28] Philip M. Smith, Language, The Sexes and Society (New York: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1985), 13.

recorded or transcribed conversations than are at present available and the long-term efforts of a research team."[29]

Consequently, the contention that proverbs about women affect how they are treated in everyday life cannot be supported through the literature. It can only be said that the evidence to date leads logically to such a conclusion. Nonetheless, some testimony has been gathered from the experiences of women in the workplace regarding language, if not proverbs themselves. Words and Women by Casey Miller and Kate Swift provided help in this area as well as other important reading about women, language, and society.

Since all subjects are in one way or another interdisciplinary, besides linguistics, material from anthropology and psychology is listed on the bibliography. Anthropologists have often written about the importance of the proverb in primitive societies, indeed in all societies, as a pocket-size description or snapshot of a culture. The link with psychology has already been established in the introduction, but Kenneth Dion's article "Psychology and Proverbs," which emphatically encourages psychologists to study proverbs because they "seem to focus on fundamental values in a given society and reflect important aspects of the human condition," supports the reasoning used when I included countries of origin with the lists of proverbs in this collection. Dion said that the dictionaries of proverbs which list the historical period when the proverb emerged, permitting historical comparisons within and between cultures, show "Commonalities of proverbs across cultures and across time . . . reflecting more generalized human concerns as well as cultural diffusion over time of proverbial wisdom."[30]

In reviewing literature for this work, an effort was made to reach as much material as possible. Computer databases and interlibrary loan helped enormously. Also consulted were the women's studies

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[29] Neal R. Norrick, How Proverbs Mean: Semantic Studies in English Proverbs (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1985), 6.

[30] Kenneth L. Dion, "Psychology and Proverbs," Canadian Psychology 31.3 (1990): 210.

and gender lists on the Interne which linked to more bibliographies than it was humanly possible to check. However, the library holdings of the Henry A. Murray Research Center of Radcliffe College of Harvard University, a leading repository of women's studies material, were accessed, as well as the Indiana University Folklore Library online. A senior researcher at the Murray Center said that she had never before had a request for this type of information and that she didn't know where to find something about it. A librarian at Indiana University reviewed the bibliography and said that it seemed to her that all of the folklore material that would be pertinent to this work had been found. Thus it appears that exhaustive research on an original topic has been accomplished with this book.

Not mentioned in this review are the works which contribute to the discussions in the Introduction, the Method and Presentation section, and the Conclusion where they prove their value by their inclusion.

Method and Presentation

America, the land of the immigrants and all they brought with them, was thought not to have a literature of its own until the 19th century. American writers in the seventeenth century wrote travel literature, histories, and diaries−choices befitting a people trying to record the great adventure of colonization in the new world. Although there was some poetry from the beginning, American writers into the eighteenth century were not pursuing literature as an art, but rather were religious and political leaders who produced practical essays for the edification of others and continued to provide records of the American experience. Eventually, satires, short moralistic tales, and even a few novels and plays appeared. Finally, in the nineteenth century, there were those who made their living at writing and produced classic examples of belles-lettres in the form of fiction and poetry as well as dialect, humor, and local-color stories.

European acceptance of the idea of an American literature did not come readily, but the enormous popularity of the unique American story and the quality of the writing could not be denied. American

writers gained recognition throughout the world and a true American literary tradition was born.

Proverbs, however, are hard to identify as uniquely American because so many were continuations of proverbs from "the old country." Wolfgang Mieder, Stewart Kingsley, and Kelsie Harder, the editors of A Dictionary of American Proverbs published in 1992, addressed this question of what makes a proverb particularly "American" in their Introduction. Their answer was that a proverb can be classified as American if it is in common use in North America or, of course, if it originated here. The same parameters are used here, although limited to the United States. While it is technically incorrect to call "American" those things which are from the United States of America only as opposed to those things which come from any of the Americas (North, Central, and South), all of the United States collections reviewed for this book called themselves American, so this common practice is followed here. Another difference with Mieder, Kingsley and Harder is that they gathered their proverbs from forty years of field work by the American Dialect Society, but for this book the sources were already published collections of proverbs that identified those proverbs that were considered American. After all, the intent was not to collect anew but to examine for trends what has already been collected in one subject area.

While journal articles provided a number of the proverbs in this collection (though perhaps only one or a few at a time), the majority came from the following books that each contributed 25 or many more:

Dictionary of American Proverbs, David Kin, editor, 1955.

A Dictionary of American Proverbs, Wolfgang Mieder, editor in chief, 1992.

A Dictionary of American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases, 1820-1880, Archer Taylor and Bartlett Jere Whiting, 1958.

Early American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases, Bartlett Jere Whiting, 1977.

Frontier Folksay: Proverbial Lore of the Inland Pacific Northwest

Frontier, Donald M. Hines, 1977.
Modern Proverbs and Proverbial Sayings, Bartlett Jere Whiting, 1989.
"Proverbs and Proverbial Sayings" in the Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore, vol. 1, Bartlett Jere Whiting, 1952.
Talk Less and Say More: Vermont Proverbs, Wolfgang Mieder, 1986.

Raymond Lamont Brown's book, A Book of Proverbs, ultimately contributed over fifty proverbs, but it is a classic example of the difficulty of choosing the proverbs for an American collection. Brown's book was published in New York in 1970. It is an American book, but careful reading reveals that the proverbs presented are actually from around the world. Only in certain areas were the proverbs clearly identified as American and those were ones that originated in the states. However, Brown is given credit for those proverbs about women found in his book that were verified as in use in the United States through other sources.

Two articles by Grant C. Loomis for Western Folklore supplied a notable number of proverbs: "Proverbs in the Golden Era," 1955 and "Proverbs in the Farmer's Almanac(k)," 1956. Speaking of almanacs, a collection of American proverbs would not be complete without the inclusion of those from Benjamin Franklin's Poor Richard's Almanack and many are referenced in this work. It should be noted that collections from across the country are represented: California, Indiana, New Mexico, New York (Thompson), North Carolina, Texas, Vermont, and Washington (Person).

One important difference between this collection and some others, most notably the Mieder dictionary, is that some published only true proverbs while here are included some phrases, sayings and proverbial comparisons, especially those found by Taylor and Whiting.

Not included are any sayings that happened to contain words like mother or daughter (Necessity is the mother of invention; Admiration

is the daughter of ignorance) but did not really describe women or make a comment about them. There were also some proverbs that offer marital advice to women, but again they do not give an insight into society's view of women, they only address women.

A number of standard and foreign collections were reviewed in search of origins for American counterparts. Of course, many of the American books and articles used for this collection had the country of origin for the proverb already listed. As a result, when the country of origin is known, it is listed in both the category section and the Index because it is interesting to look for the trends that might be discerned in different cultures. The same is true for different geographical areas of the United States. In particular, proverbs from the southwestern portion of the country seem to stand out for their manner of expression.

The organization of this work is as follows. First, the proverbs identified as American are presented in categories. These categories were chosen according to the natural patterns into which the proverbs seemed to fall, i.e., according to the type of message they carry. Since the topic is women, some groupings were obvious identifications such as mother, or situations such as married and widowed, while others describe women in a certain way such as virtuous or as property. While these categories are arbitrary and could have been chosen differently, it is interesting to note that T. F. Thiselton-Dyer used virtually the same divisions in his book Folklore of Women.

In the category section, the proverbs are presented in alphabetical order with any variations; with any references to like proverbs; with the name of any state where the proverb is known to be used; with the nationality of the proverb's origin if that is known (or at least where is it also known to be used); or with any year of first-known publication information; but without bibliographic information. The date of first-known publication is provided because it makes another interesting reference point for analysis.

The proverbs are preceded in each chapter by an interpretive introduction. In the shorter chapters, an effort was made to include a discussion of every proverb from that category in the introduction,

but in the larger chapters not every proverb could be included without getting ridiculously long and repetitive. Besides, the reader should be allowed to have some sense of self-discovery anyway, so representative samples should be sufficient to point out trends and the controversial and intriguing messages.

Also, the format is arranged so as to list the proverbs one at a time to make it easy to distinguish one from another. The biggest problem with Thiselton-Dyer's book was that the material was presented in paragraph form, so it was impossible to find any one particular proverb without reading through a mass of prose. This effort to separate information into clearly distinguishable parts took a great deal of time and space, but it is similar to the dictionary form that one finds in other collections.

The categories appear in order of the largest group of proverbs to the smallest group, followed by a miscellaneous section. These selections are by no means definitive−many proverbs could have fit into more than one category; they are only an attempt to organize the collection into a workable scheme.

A conclusion regarding the implications of the collection is given as the last chapter. Suggestions for further study and a review of the questions raised by this collection are discussed there.

Following the chapters, there is an index listing all of the proverbs together in alphabetical order. In this section, the source of the proverb, whether in one publication or more, will be listed, and the page number for the place of the proverb in a category chapter will be given. Once again, variations, state, nationality, and year of first-known publication information will be provided.

Finally, a bibliography is given citing first the many sources for the proverbs found in books and then periodicals, and listing second the scholarly works about proverbs, women's studies, linguistics and other areas related to this study which were consulted, also divided between books and periodicals.

CHAPTER 1
Wives and Marriage

The overwhelming majority of proverbs that discuss women in a role deal with women as wives (A wife is a young man's slave and an old man's darling) or the subject of marriage as it affects women (Marriage is the supreme blunder that all women make). A whole spectrum of attitudes is reflected in these proverbs: advice, warnings, overt double standards, appreciation and resignation.

The opening proverb below, "All are good girls, but where do the bad wives come from?" (see also: A good maid sometimes makes a bad wife) begins the discussion where all marriages begin−two people are in love and expect that they will live happily ever after. But "All married women are not wives," and "Lots of men get women, but few get wives." In fact, "The most fascinating women never make the best marriages."

But who makes a good marriage? Is it "A good wife is the workmanship of a good husband" or "A good wife makes a good husband"? One proverb says "The happiest wife is not she that gets the best husband but she that makes the best of that which she gets." But what if "She drove her ducks to a poor market" i.e., she made a bad marriage from the start? Then, "She that hath a bad husband hath a hell within her own house" and she "shows it in her dress" [Concerning this latter expression, Thiselton-Dyer explained that "the wife who has a grievance will be sure to make it known."[31]] Indeed, "If you want to know a bad husband, look at his wife's countenance."

Although there is a proverb which says "One good husband is worth two good wives; for the scarcer things are the more they're valued," the proverb makers lean more to the belief that it is the wife who causes the most problems within a marriage. Starting with the attitude that "Matrimony is an insane idea on the part of a man to pay some woman's board" and "When a man takes a wife, he ceases to

[31] Thomas Firminger Thiselton-Dyer, Folklore of Women (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1906), 170.

dread hell," it is no wonder that men are advised "When you choose a wife shut your eyes and commend your soul to God." Should a man get a bad wife, he will have "purgatory for a neighbor." In fact, he will quickly come to know that there are only "Two good days for a man in his life: when he weds, and when he buries his wife," and that "A wife is seen with pleasure only at the wedding and in the winding sheet." This thought continues in two other proverbs: "Grief for a dead wife, and a troublesome guest, continues to the threshold and there is at rest. But I mean such wives as are none of the best"; "It's a sweet sorrow to bury a nagging wife."

Since money is so important to men, it is no surprise that one of their major complaints against their wives is the expense of being married (It is cheaper to find a wife than to feed a wife). So, first, one should marry money: "A fair wife without a fortune is a fine house without furniture." Once married, "Many a man sees a wolf at the door because his wife sees a mink in the window" and "A nice wife and a back door oft do make a rich man poor." Or so he says. "Generally when a man feels the need for economy he thinks it ought to begin with his wife" because "Many blame the wife for their own thriftless life." So he tells her "Wife, make thine own candle, Spare penny to handle."

Trusting a wife seems to be another big problem for men: "Give your wife the short knife, keep the long one yourself." A man shouldn't confide in his wife: "He knows little who tells his wife all he knows"; "He that tells his wife news is but newly married." Also, "He who loves his wife should watch her" and that is why "God is the guardian of a blind man's wife" because, as Thiselton-Dyer explained, the blind man "cannot look after her and control her movements."[32] Of course, if a man marries a beautiful woman he is just asking for trouble: "He that hath a fair wife never wants trouble"; "He who has a fair wife needs more than two eyes"; "If you marry a beautiful blonde, you marry trouble"; "The wife who loves the looking glass hates the

[32] Thiselton-Dyer, 162.

saucepan" [and we all know a lack of domestic skills makes a woman worthless to her husband]; "You cannot pluck roses without fear of thorns nor enjoy a fair wife without danger of horns." "

A bad wife ruins a family" and that generally occurs when the wife usurps her husband's position as head of the household. Warnings against such a catastrophe start with wedding day superstitions such as "If the newly-married couple were to dance together on their wedding day, the wife would thenceforth rule the roast [roost]." Since most couples dance on their wedding day, maybe it becomes a given then that "He who has a wife has a master"; and "A man must ask his wife's leave to thrive." Still, there is shame in such a situation (When a man's a fool, his wife will rule), so husbands are advised "Rule a wife and have a wife." Meanwhile, wives are given the patronizing consolation that "An obedient wife commands her husband." In reality, "A captain of industry is nothing but a buck private to his wife" and "No man is a hero to his wife or his butler." Sometimes, "A man who is wise is only as wise as his wife thinks he is," and it could be argued that "A true wife is her husband's better half."

The combination of two people in marriage may cause some strange bedfellows: "The calmest husbands make the stormiest wives"; "A deaf husband and a blind wife are always a happy couple" [another slam at a woman's talkative nature and advice to her that it is probably best if she does not see his shenanigans, after all "Discreet wives have sometimes neither eyes nor ears"]; furthermore, "Fat wives make lean husbands" and, conversely, "A light wife makes a heavy husband."

Proverbs that predict a successful couple include: "A warm-back husband and a cold-foot wife should easily lead a compatible life"; and "When the husband earns well, the wife spends well" which, according to Thiselton-Dyer, is a variation on the Dutch proverb "When the husband earns well, The wife spins well" meaning the husband and wife love each other and work together.[33]

[33] Thiselton-Dyer, 160.

So, it is possible to find a good wife and that "Saith Solomon the wise" "is a good prize." Furthermore, "A worthy woman is the crown of her husband" and "A good wife and health are man's best wealth." Unfortunately, all three of these proverbs make wives sound like property. Similarly, but with sentiment, there is a proverb that says "A good wife lost is God's gift lost." Still, the proverbs can't resist reminding people that the pendulum could swing either way: "He that has a good wife has an angel by his side; he that has a bad one has a devil at this elbow"; "A man's best fortune, or his worst, is his wife."

If the course of true love does take a bad turn, perhaps it results because "There are men who go to a gymnasium for exercise while their wives are sawing the wood." If a man is self-centered, he will be that irresponsible and will be proud of "the calves of his legs" while his devoted wife is, oddly enough, proud of him. Perhaps he is following the advice of the proverb "Never praise your wife until you have been married ten years." But in that case, "A man who never praises his wife deserves to have a poor one."

That "Husband and wife are one flesh" is a belief reflected in "If the wife sins, the husband is equally guilty" (A Baptist couple explained this relationship to me once, insisting that the husband would be held accountable for his wife on Judgment Day. Since the woman was on her third husband, I wondered how that would work and why women cannot be given so much as the responsibility for their very own souls.) On the other hand, "The wife is the keeper of her husband's conscience as well as his soul."

Fidelity is expected of the wife, but not the husband in proverbs. This double standard is seen in "A faithless wife is the shipwreck of the home" (what about a faithless husband?); "If a man is unfaithful to his wife, it's like spitting from a house into the street; but if a woman is unfaithful to her husband, it's like spitting from the street into the house"; and the use of "man and wife" instead of the parallel "husband and wife."

In summary, one gets the feeling that this entire discussion could be reduced to the opinion that is expressed by one proverb: "A good wife is a perfect lady in the living room, a good cook in the kitchen,

and a harlot in the bedroom." In other words, a wife exists to be of service to her husband as a hostess, cook, and lover. Anything else and she is a troublesome shrew who brings a man only misery. To convince men that the risk of getting a bad wife is worth taking, proverbs provide the appropriate propaganda with sayings such as "He that has not got a wife is not yet a complete man"; "A man without a wife is like a fork without a knife"; "Where there is no wife there is no home." Such sentiment balances out the negative and helps to make the following set of proverbs an intriguing look at the collected wisdom and jaded experience of many centuries.

All are good girls, but where do the bad wives come from? (Spanish; New York)

Variation: All are good lasses; but where come the ill wives frae? (1866; Scottish)

All married women are not wives.

A bad wife likes to see her husband's heels turned to the door. (Danish; Pacific Northwest)

A bad wife ruins a family. (Chinese)

Better a fortune in a wife than with a wife. (Vermont)

Borrowed wives, like borrowed books, are rarely returned.

But then you know a man can't wive and thrive the same year.

Caesar's wife must be above suspicion.
The calmest husbands make the stormiest wives. (1604; Illinois)

A captain of industry is nothing but a buck private to his wife. (Illinois)

The cunning wife makes her husband her apron. (1866)
Variation: The cunning wife makes her husband an apron.

A deaf husband and a blind wife are always a happy couple. (1578; German; Illinois, New York, Ohio, Wisconsin)
Variation: To make a happy couple, the husband must be deaf and the wife blind.

A dirty bread tray tells of a wasteful wife. (North Carolina)

Discreet wives have sometimes neither eyes nor ears. (1594; Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet; Michigan)

A fair wife without a fortune is a fine house without furniture. (1797; English)

A faithless wife is the shipwreck of the home.

Fat wives make lean husbands.

The first wife is matrimony; the second, company; the third, heresy. (1569; Italian)

The first wife remembers everything.

French girls are virtually put on the shelf as soon as the wedding excitement is over.

Generally when a man feels the need of economy he thinks it ought to begin with his wife. (Pacific Northwest)
Give your wife the short knife, keep the long one yourself. (Danish; Pacific Northwest)

God help the man who won't marry until he finds the perfect woman, and God help him still more if he finds her. (Illinois)

God is the guardian of a blind man's wife. (Hindustani)

A good maid sometimes makes a bad wife. (Alabama, Georgia)

A good wife and health are man's best wealth. (1746; Franklin; English; Vermont)

A good wife is a perfect lady in the living room, a good cook in the kitchen, and a harlot in the bedroom. (1942; New York)
Variation: A wife should be a lady in the parlor a mother in the kitchen, and a whore in bed.

A good wife is the workmanship of a good husband. (1866)
Variation: Good wives and good plantations are made by good husbands. (1736; Franklin; New York)
Variation: A good Jack makes a good Jill.
[See also: A good wife makes a good husband.]

A good wife lost is God's gift lost. (1733; Franklin)

A good wife makes a good husband. (1546; English; Indiana, North Carolina)

Grief for a dead wife, and a troublesome guest, continues to the threshold and there is at rest. But I mean such wives as are none of the best. (1734; Franklin; New York)

A hairy man's rich, a hairy wife's a witch. (North Carolina)

The happiest wife is not she that gets the best husband but she that makes the best of that which she gets. (1913; New York)

He knows little who tells his wife all he knows. (1642; Wisconsin)

He that has a good wife has an angel by his side; he that has a bad one has a devil at his elbow. (Louisiana, Michigan, New York)

He that has not got a wife is not yet a complete man. (1744; Franklin; New York)
Variation: A man without a wife is but half a man. (1755)

He that hath a fair wife never wants trouble. (Pacific Northwest)
[See: He who has a fair wife needs more than two eyes.]
[See: If you marry a beautiful blonde, you marry trouble.]

He that hath a good wife shows it in his dress. (1866)

He that takes a wife takes care. (1495; New York)

He that tells his wife news is but newly married. (1275; German; New Jersey)

He who has a fair wife needs more than two eyes. (1545; New York)
[See: He that hath a fair wife never wants trouble.]

He who has a wife has a master.
Variation: He who takes a wife finds a master. (French; Pacific Northwest)

He who hasn't anything to do pulls his wife's eyes out. (New York)

He who loves his wife should watch her. (Arkansas)

He who wishes to chastise a fool, gets him a wife. (1866)
Husband and wife are one flesh. (Yiddish)

If a man is unfaithful to his wife, it's like spitting from a house into the street; but if a woman is unfaithful to her husband, it's like spitting from the street into the house. (North Carolina)

If the newly-married couple were to dance together on their wedding day, the wife would thenceforth rule the roast [sic].

If the wife sins, the husband is equally guilty.

If you make your wife an ass, she will make you an ox.

If you marry a beautiful blonde, you marry trouble. (1936; Illinois)
[See: He that hath a fair wife never wants trouble.]

If your wife is small, bend down to take her counsel. (1948; New York)

If you take a wife from hell, she will bring you back. (1793)

If you want to know a bad husband, look at his wife's countenance. (Pacific Northwest)

It is a good man that never stumbles, and a good wife that never grumbles.
A Spanish Variation: It is a good horse that never stumbles. . . .)

It is cheaper to find a wife than to feed a wife. (Illinois)

It's a sweet sorrow to bury a nagging wife.

A kind wife makes a faithful husband. (Michigan)

A light wife makes a heavy husband. (1597; Shakespeare; New York)
Look after your wife; never mind yourself, she'll look after you. (Pacific Northwest)

Lots of men get women, but few get wives. (Kentucky, Tennessee)

A man can't serve two mistresses−his country and his wife.

A man must ask his wife's leave to thrive. (1797; German)
Variation: A man must ask his wife to thrive. (1866)
Variation: A man must ask his wife if he may be rich. (Pacific Northwest)

A man's best fortune, or his worst, is his wife. (1795; Spanish)
Variation: "virtue" for "fortune"

A man that cheats his wife may cheat many others. (Vermont)

A man who is wise is only as wise as his wife thinks he is. (New York, South Carolina)

A man who kicks his dog will beat his wife. (Kentucky)

The man who never praises his wife deserves to have a poor one. (Pacific Northwest)

A man without a wife is like a fork without a knife. (1866)

Many a man sees a wolf at the door because his wife sees a mink in the window. (Mississippi)

Many blame the wife for their own thriftless life. (1866)

Marriage is the supreme blunder that all women make.

Matrimony is an insane idea on the part of a man to pay some woman's board.
Variation: Matrimony has been defined to be an insane idea on the part of a man to pay some woman's board. (Texas)

The more men love their glasses, the less they love their wives. (1866)

The most fascinating women never make the best marriages.

Most men get as good a wife as they deserve. (1948; New York)

Motherless husband makes happy wife.
Variation: She's the happiest wife that marries the son of a dead mother.

A neat maiden often makes a dirty wife.

Ne'er seek a wife till you know what to do with her.

Ne'er take a wife till thou hast a house (and a fire) to put her in. (1733; Franklin)

Never praise your wife until you have been married ten years. (Arkansas)

Next to no wife, a good wife is best. (1497; New Jersey)

A nice wife and a back door oft do make a rich man poor. (1450; English; New York)

A no-account wife takes advice from everyone but her husband. (Mississippi)

No man is a hero to his wife or his butler. (1603)
Nothing on arth puts a feller to his stump like pulling in the same team with a purty gal.

An obedient wife commands her husband. (1866; English)
Variation: The woman who obeys her husband rules him. (1642; Utah)
Variation: A virtuous woman commands her husband by obeying him. (Syrus; Illinois)

An old bachelor is fussy because he has never had a wife to fuss at him. (North Carolina)

One good husband is worth two good wives; for the scarcer things are the more they're valued.

A quiet wife is mighty pretty. (Illinois)

Rather spoil your joke than roil your wife.

Rule a wife and have a wife. (Kentucky, Tennessee)

Saith Solomon the wise, "A good wife is a good prize." (1866)

The second wife always sits on the right knee. (1940; New York)

A sensible wife looks for her enjoyment at "home"−a silly one, "abroad." (Pacific Northwest)

She drove her ducks to a poor market. [she made a bad marriage] (1939; Indiana)

She that hath a bad husband hath a hell within her own house. (1866)

She that hath an ill husband shows it in her dress. (1866)

She tried it on at first, saying your presence, sir, by going to bed missus and getting up master.

She who marries a man for his money, will have the man but not the money. (Washington)

The shoemaker's wife goes barefoot.
Variation: Shoemakers' wives are the worst shod.

Variation: The smith's mare and the cobbler's wife are always the worst shod.

Take a friend for what he does, a wife for what she has, and goods for what they are worth. (Illinois, Ohio)

There are men who go to a gymnasium for exercise while their wives are sawing the wood. (Pacific Northwest)

There is many a good wife that can't sing and dance well. (1866)

There is one good wife in the country, and every man thinks he hath her. (1866)

They all know what to do with a bad wife but he who's got one. (1621; Utah)

A true wife is her husband's better half. (Mississippi)
Variation: A true wife is her husband's flower of beauty. (Mississippi)
Variation: A true wife is her husband's heart's treasure. (Mississippi)

A true wife is proud of her husband; he, the calves of his legs. (Pacific Northwest)

Two good days for a man in his life: when he weds, and when he buries his wife.

Want makes strife between man and wife. (1732; Illinois)
A warm-back husband and a cold-foot wife should easily lead a compatible life. (Vermont)

When a man's a fool, his wife will rule.

When a man takes a wife, he ceases to dread hell. (California)

When the good man is from home, the good wife's table is soon spread.

When the husband earns well, the wife spends well. (Wisconsin)

When the husband's away, the wife will play. (Tennessee)

When you choose a wife shut your eyes and commend your soul to God. (Spanish; Pacific Northwest)

Where there is no wife there is no home.

Who finds a wife finds a good thing. (1948; New York)

Who has a bad wife, has purgatory for a neighbor. (1866)

Who is the wife of one cannot eat the rice of two. (Indiana)

A wife can make or break her husband. [financially] (Yiddish)

Wife, from thy spouse each blemish hide, more than from the world beside.

A wife is a young man's slave and an old man's darling. (1546; English; Illinois)

Variation: Better be an old man's darling, than a young man's slave.

A wife is seen with pleasure only at the wedding and in the winding sheet.(1786)

The wife is the keeper of her husband's conscience as well as his soul.

Wife, make thine own candle, Spare penny to handle. [thrifty] (1940; New York)

The wife who loves the looking glass hates the saucepan.

A worthy woman is the crown of her husband. (1948; New York)

You cannot pluck roses without fear of thorns nor enjoy a fair wife without danger of horns. (Wisconsin)

A young woman married to an old man must behave like an old woman.

Brides

Being a wife starts with being a bride. Because this occasion is so enormously special, brides gets separate attention from the proverbs as noted below. There is no great mystery to any of these proverbs, One stems from a superstition: “A sad bride makes a glad wife.” "Happy the bride the sun shines on" “had once a practical application when marriages were celebrated on the church porch. A wet day on such an occasion was a serious matter"[34] Otherwise, the remaining proverbs are, like most proverbs, expressions of observations of life.
Afoot and alone, as the gal went to be married.

All brides are child brides in their mother's eyes. (New York)

As flat as a bride's biscuits.

At a wedding feast, the one to eat the least is the bride. (Spanish)

Bridesmaids may soon be made brides.

Happy the bride the sun shines on. (1648)

[34] Thiselton-Dyer, 208-209.

Variation: Happy the bride the sun shines on and happy the corpse the rain pours on.

It's a poor bride who cannot help some. (Vermont)

A rich bride goes young to the church. (Wisconsin)

A sad bride makes a glad wife. (Illinois)

The same flowers that adorn a bride are placed on a corpse.

Shinin' like a gal's face when she's a fixin' to be married.

CHAPTER 2
A Woman's Nature

Remarks about the behavior of women and relationships with them, i.e., what is in their nature and what one can expect from them, are very common among American proverbs about women. There is a diversity of comment ranging from tribute to tirade (Nature meant woman to be her masterpiece; Women are the root of all evil), yet the negative and sarcastic dominate.

Women, it appears, aren't worth much (A man of straw is worth a woman of gold; All women are good; good for something or good for nothing) unless they are prime goods on the market (A simple maiden in her flower is worth a hundred coats-of-arms [referring to virginity]). A man had better hurry, though, before the prize is spoiled since "Maids are drawn to pleasure as moths to the flame." Even then, the prize may not be worth the price because "Maids want nothing but husbands, and then they want everything."

Similarly, "Grasp at a woman and hold a nettle." Such a warning is repeatedly given by the proverbs about the trouble women cause (The fewer the women, the less the trouble; There is no mischief but a woman is at the heart of it; Where there's a woman, there's trouble; A woman is at the bottom of every lawsuit). Women are probably so much trouble because they are conniving by nature (Female is one head with two faces; A woman knows a bit more than Satan). Consequently, "Woman is woe to man" because "Any girl can handle the beast in a man if she's cagey enough" and "play the deuce with a fellow." That is why "The female of the species is more deadly than the male."

Furthermore, "The female's cunning is equal to her obstinacy": "No argument can convince a woman or a stubborn ass"; "An opinion formed by a woman is inflexible; the fact is not half so stubborn"; "A woman convinced against her will, Is of the same opinion still." Because of her stubbornness, "Never quarrel with a woman" for "A woman must have her way" (Thou lovest thine own will; but as for that matter show me the woman that does not), and that can be a

"dangerous ill" considering that a woman's proverbial reputation includes "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned"; "No fish without bone; no woman without a temper"; "A woman's vengeance knows no bounds"; and "You get a woman mad and her blood good and hot, better let her blood cool for she'll sho' hurt you."

"Women are strong when they arm themselves with their weaknesses," and one of those is tears. There are nine proverbs in this collection whose subject is tears, thus attesting to the extent of the belief that a woman's tears may not be sincere, but a man is honor-bound to assuage them: "Every woman is wrong until she cries, and then she is right instantly"; "Men aren't worth the salt of a woman's tears"; "Men should be careful lest they cause women to weep, for God counts their tears"; "Nothing dries sooner that a woman's tears"; "Weeping like a girl"; "A woman's strongest weapons are her tears"; "A woman's tears are a fountain of craft"; "Women have tears at command"; "Women laugh when they can and weep when they will."

Tears are just part of what contributes to women being considered the weaker sex (Frailty, your name is woman). Proverbs describe the woman as "pale and spoony" with a heart as soft as cushions. The ideal for a woman is to be a delicate lady who "takes a pin to eat a pea" and who would find it "hard to be a biddy and a lady too." The proverbs seem to have quite an interest in the woman's role as a lady: "It's a poor house that can't support one lady"; "A lady is known by the product she endorses"; "Once a lady, always a lady"; "You mustn't rush a lady."

It is contradictory to talk about women being conniving and getting their way, then describe them as weak and soft. The explanation of this contradiction might be that men want women to be weak so they can be dominated, thus they complain when women show any strength. It is also contradictory to glorify the status of being a lady, then say "All women and cats are black in darkness," "All women look the same after the sun goes down," and "The Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady are sisters under the skin." These latter proverbs indicate an attitude that all women have the same

value no matter what their clothes or manners or virtue because their only real purpose is for sex.

If there appears to be confusion expressed as to the merit of women, perhaps it is because the male authors of the proverbs felt that "Woman brings to man the greatest blessing and the greatest plague." If a woman is a mystery to a man, perhaps it is because "Woman is the key to life's mystery." In short, to men "A woman is the greatest contradiction of all."

It's the nature of things for women to behave in certain ways, the proverbs seem to say, and it's unnatural for women to behave in certain other ways (a point emphasized in the section on "Place"). Despite the proverb: "There are two kinds of women: those who take what you are and those who take what you have," proverbs provide a long list of other characteristics for women: they are slow, gentle, bashful, never satisfied, vivacious, affectionate, and curious. Women are the devil's nets and queer cattle. Women have fears but no souls. "Music is the key to the female heart." "A woman is known by her walking and drinking." "Women are wise on a sudden, fools on premeditation."

The proverbs have an unkindly way of saying that a woman wants attention (She wants to be the bride at every wedding and the corpse at every funeral; A woman that loves to be at the windows is like a bunch of grapes in the highway) and she wants romance (Once a woman gives you her heart you can never get rid of the rest of her; A woman's whole life is a history of the affections).

One could not discuss the nature of women without touching upon the subject of intelligence, which is an eternal topic in the battle of the sexes. Because it has long been thought that "Little girls have little wit" and that "It takes as much wit not to displease a woman as it takes little to please her," women have had to play dumb to play it safe: "It takes a smart woman to be a fool." So, "A man thinks he knows, but a woman knows better." Besides, "Stupidity in a woman is unfeminine" so "A woman conceals what she knows not."

There are proverbs which discuss the characteristics of men, too, and sometimes the two go together: "Thrift is to a man what chastity

is to a woman"; "A gracious woman retains honor (and strong men retain their riches)"; and "Man gets and forgets, woman gives and forgives." The first two proverbs mean that men are concerned with the value of money while women are concerned with the value of their reputations, once again indicating that to men brute force and money are power while a woman's only power rests in charm and sexual favors (Beware, though: "Woman learns how to hate when she has lost the ability to charm."). The latter proverb means that men are self-centered takers who use other people for their own ends while women are the nurturers and peacemakers.

There are too many proverbs in this category to mention them all. Suffice it to say that "Girls will be girls" whatever that is and "a woman is always a woman." To men, "Woman−she shares our griefs, doubles our joys and trebles our expenses" probably sums up their opinion of women. Yet they also admit "Everything goes to loose ends where there is no woman." Wanting to feel needed too, men say "A woman without a man is like a handle without a pan." To women, reality is "What ever women do they must do twice as well as men to be thought half as good. Luckily, this is not difficult."

All women and cats are black in darkness. (1745; Wisconsin)

All women are good; good for something or good for nothing. (1866; English)

All women look the same after the sun goes down. (1948; Illinois)

The American woman, if left to her own devices, washes on Monday, irons on Tuesday, bakes on Wednesday, and marries on Thursday.
Any girl can handle the beast in a man if she's cagey enough. (Mississippi)

As great a pity to see a woman weep as to see a goose go barefoot. [They do it all the time, so no cause for concern.] (1523)

But now he is as pale and spoony as a milliner's girl.

The Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady are sisters under the skin.
[or: Judy O'Grady and the Colonel's lady] (North Carolina)

Confound this powder−it's as slow as a woman.

Cushions as soft as a young gal's heart.

A dainty lady takes a pin to eat a pea. (Jamaica; North Carolina)

Everything goes to loose ends where there is no woman.

Every woman is wrong until she cries, and then she is right instantly.

Every woman keeps a corner in her heart where she is always twenty-one. (Illinois, New York)

Female is one head with two faces. (Florida)

The female of the species is more deadly than the male. [from The Female of the Species by Rudyard Kipling (1865-1935)]
Variation: The female is the more deadly of the species. (1911)

The female's cunning is equal to her obstinacy.

The fewer the women, the less the trouble. (Illinois)

Frailty, your name is woman. (1600; Shakespeare; German; Minnesota, New York)

Girls will be girls.

A gracious woman retains honor. (and strong men retain their riches)

Grasp at a woman and hold a nettle. (1817)

He gets on best with women who know best how to get along without them.

He is as gentle as a woman when he has no rival near him.

Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. [based on a quotation from The Mourning Bride by William Congreve (1670-1729)] (1696; Illinois, New Jersey, Oregon)
Variation: Hell knows no wrath like a woman scorned.

He was as bashful as a girl.

How many times, while sighing, is a woman laughing. (Mexican-American)

Is a woman ever satisfied? No, if she were she wouldn't be a woman. (New Jersey)

It is hard to be a biddy and a lady too. [It is hard to be the maid and the hostess at the same time.] (New York, South Carolina)

It's a poor house that can't afford one lady.
Variation: "support" for "afford" (Kansas, New York)

It takes a smart woman to be a fool. (Maryland)

It takes as much wit not to displease a woman as it takes little to please her. (Pacific Northwest)

A lady is known by the product she endorses. (1936; New York, South Carolina)

Little girls have little wit.

Long thread, lazy girl. (Washington)

Maids are drawn to pleasure as moths to the flame.

Maids want nothing but husbands, and then they want everything. (1678; English)

Man gets and forgets, woman gives and forgives. (New York, South Carolina)

A man of straw is worth a woman of gold. (1866; French)

A man thinks he knows, but a woman knows better. (1938)

Men aren't worth the salt of a woman's tears. (Vermont)

Men should be careful lest they cause women to weep, for God counts their tears. (Pacific Northwest)

The mistress makes the morning, But the Lord makes the afternoon.

Music is the key to the female heart. (Illinois)

Nature meant woman to be her masterpiece.

Never quarrel with a woman. (1875; Chinese; Indiana)

No argument can convince a woman or a stubborn ass.
Variation: "will" for "can." (Illinois, North Carolina)

No fish without bone; no woman without a temper.

Nothing dries sooner than a woman's tears. (1563; Oklahoma, Texas)

Oh a woman is always a woman.

Once a lady, always a lady. (New York, South Carolina)

Once a woman gives you her heart you can never get rid of the rest of her. (1696; Illinois)

One girl is a girl, two girls are half a girl, and three girls are no girl at all. (1930; Kentucky, Tennessee)

The only way to get the upper hand of a woman is not to be more woman than she is herself. (Pacific Northwest)

An opinion formed by a woman is inflexible; the fact is not half so stubborn. (Pacific Northwest)

Our girlhood determines our womanhood. (Florida)

The premonitory symptoms of love are as evident to a woman as are those of any other eruptive disease about to break out to a Philadelphia doctor.

She's one of the old blue hen's chickens. [i.e., a hellcat, a termagant] (Texas)

She wants to be the bride at every wedding and the corpse at every funeral. (Washington)

A simple maiden in her flower is worth a hundred coats-of-arms. [virginity]

A small sprinkling of the feminine gender, jest enough to take the cuss off, and no more.

Smelt as sweet as a gal's breath.

Stupidity in a woman is unfeminine.

There are two kinds of women: those who take what you are and those who take what you have. (New Jersey, North Carolina)

There is no mischief but a woman is at the heart of it.
Variation: There is no mischief done, but a woman is one.
Variation: There is no mischief in the world done, but a woman is always one. (1866)
[See: There's hardly a strife in which a woman has not been a prime mover.]

Thou lovest thine own will; but as for that matter show me the woman that does not. (Pacific Northwest)

Thrift is to a man is what chastity is to a woman. (1937; New York, South Carolina)

Too much whiskey will kill; too many women will chill.

Vivacity is the gift of woman. (Illinois)

Weeping like a girl.

What ever women do they must do twice as well as men to be thought half as good. Luckily, this is not difficult.

Where there's a woman, there's trouble.

Woman brings to man the greatest blessing and the greatest plague. (1948; Illinois)

A woman can play the deuce (devil) with a fellow.

A woman conceals what she knows not. (1386; Chaucer; Oklahoma, Texas)

Variation: A woman conceals what she does not know. (French; Pacific Northwest)

A woman convinced against her will, Is of the same opinion still. (North Carolina)
Variation: "lady persuaded" for "woman convinced." (Kansas, Ohio)

A woman is at the bottom of every lawsuit.
Variation: There is scarcely a lawsuit unless a woman is the cause of it.

A woman is known by her walking and drinking. (Spanish; New York)

A woman is the greatest contradiction of all. (Illinois)
Variation: Woman at best is a contradiction still. [from Pope's "Moral Essays"] (Pacific Northwest)

Woman is the key to life's mystery.

Woman is woe to man. (1700)

A woman knows a bit more than Satan. (1559; Illinois)

Woman learns how to hate when she has lost the ability to charm.

A woman listens to a play with her mind and judges it with her senses. (Pacific Northwest)

Woman must have her way. (1774)
Variation: A woman will always have her way.
Variation: Woman will have both her word and her way. (Illinois, New York)
Variation: Man has his will, but woman has her way.

Variation: A woman has her way.

A woman's friendship is, as a rule, the legacy of love or the alms of indifference. (Pacific Northwest)

Woman−she shares our griefs, doubles our joys and trebles our expenses.(Pacific Northwest)

A woman spins even while she talks. [under "shrewdness"]

A woman's strongest weapons are her tears. (Pacific Northwest)

A woman's tears are a fountain of craft. (English; Pacific Northwest)

A woman's vengeance knows no bounds. (German)

A woman's whole life is a history of the affections. (New York)

A woman that loves to be at the windows is like a bunch of grapes in the highway. (1804)

Woman thy name is curiosity. (1775)

The woman who likes washing can always find water.

A woman without a man is like a handle without a pan. (1867)

Women and dogs set men together by the ears. (1639; Illinois, New York)

Women and elephants never forget. (1910; Illinois)

Women and their wills are dangerous ills.

Women are a good deal like licker, ef you love 'em too hard thar sure to throw you some way.

Women are always in extremes. (1526; Illinois, New York)
Variation: Women are in extremes, they are better or worse than men. (French)

Women are kittle (queer) cattle.

Women are saints in church, angels in the street, devils in the kitchen, apes in bed. (1559; Illinois)

Women are strong when they arm themselves with their weaknesses.

Women are the devil's nets. (1520; Illinois)

Women are the root of all evil. (1948; Wisconsin)

Women are wise on a sudden, fools on premeditation. (1866)
Variation: Women are wise impromptu, fools on reflection. (Italian)

Women be forgetful, Children be unkind, Executors are covetous and take what they can find.

Women can tolerate everything−except each other. [under "misogyny"]

Women commend an honest man: but they do not like him.
Variation: Women commend a modest man but like him not.

Women confess their small faults that their candor may cover great ones.

Women do not read; they listen with the eye. (Pacific Northwest)

Women forgive injuries but never forget slights. (1843; New York)

Women have no souls. (1638)

Women have tears at command. (1712)

Women have their fears.

Women laugh when they can and weep when they will. (1866; French)

Variation: . . . and cry when they want to. (Mexican-American)

Variation: A woman laughs when she can and weeps when she pleases.

Variation: A woman laughs when she can but cries whenever she wishes. (1570; New Jersey)

Women, like princes, find few real friends. (Pacific Northwest)

Women must always have the last word.

Variation: Women will have the last word. (1541; Illinois, New York)

Variation: A woman has the last word.

Women rouge that they may not blush. (Italian)

Women sometimes exaggerate a little, and this is an important point to be remembered by men and women. (Wisconsin)

You can never tell about women, but if you can, you shouldn't.

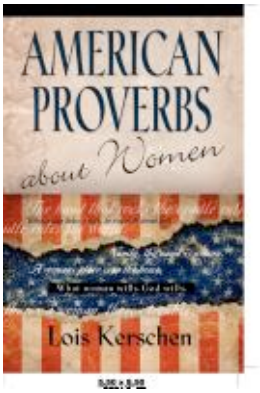
You can take the girl out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the girl. (Illinois, Kansas)

Variation: You can take a girl off a farm, but you can't take the farm out of a girl.

You can't live with them (women/men) and you can't live without them. (Washington)

You get a woman mad and her blood good and hot, better let her blood cool for she'll sho' hurt you. (South Carolina)

You mustn't rush a lady. (Ohio)



American Proverbs About Women *is an examination of how women are treated by these popular sayings that perpetuate folk wisdom. While some are true-to-life, some are saccharine, and some are demeaning, condescending, and even violent towards women. Readers will be entertained yet disturbed as they assess the impact of these proverbs on our cultural perspective. Over 800 proverbs are categorized by type and identified according to states or countries and dates of origin.*

American Proverbs About Women