

THE COMMENTARY ON FEMALE SELF-DISCIPLINE IN SUSANNA
ROWSON'S *CHARLOTTE TEMPLE* AND HANNAH
WEBSTER FOSTER'S *THE COQUETTE*

by

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis studies Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* and Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* to explore the embedded commentary about the discourse of female self-discipline in the two novels. As two best-selling seduction stories in post-Revolutionary America, *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* have often been discussed in terms of what the authors assert about the cultural emphasis on women's virtue in the early Republic through their stories about a young woman suffering and dying as a result of seduction and abandonment. In this thesis, I argue that Rowson and Foster use their narratives to study the particular rhetoric of rewards that was used in conduct writings on female self-discipline widely read in late eighteenth-century America. Propagating the tenets of women's self-discipline, conduct writers presented moral autonomy and supportive friendship as two rewards to the woman who successfully proved herself as a self-regulating, virtuous woman. Using the narrator figure and the epistolary form respectively, Rowson and Foster modify the heroine-centered seduction plot to build their narratives in a parallel structure, in which they study and question the viability and the logical cogency of this rhetoric of rewards of conduct writers. By elucidating this questioning

of the rhetoric of conduct writers in the two novels, I aim to shed light on both the cultural commentary about female self-discipline in *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* and the structural machinations working in each novel to accommodate such a commentary.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	v
Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. THE DISCOURSE OF FEMALE SELF-DISCIPLINE AND THE RHETORIC OF REWARDS	11
3. <i>CHARLOTTE TEMPLE</i>	34
4. <i>THE COQUETTE</i>	57
5. CONCLUSION	80
WORKS CITED	84
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION	87

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I analyze Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1791; 1794) and Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797) for the embedded commentary about the discourse of female self-discipline in post-Revolutionary America. *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* were the two best-selling American novels published in the last decade of the eighteenth century. *Charlotte Temple*, the story of a young British woman who is seduced by a soldier and follows him to America, was widely read in America after its first American publication in 1794 and by 1805 had gone through sixteen editions. *The Coquette*, another story that featured a seduced woman's fate, also enjoyed a widespread popularity, becoming the "second best-selling novel before the nineteenth century" (Bontatibus 4). Early readers bought the two novels or borrowed them from subscription or circulating libraries, and read them solitarily or in groups until the copies fell apart (Davidson *Revolution* 232). The two novels' popularity has attracted scholarly attention about why late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century American readers found them particularly engaging and read them relentlessly. *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* have been discussed particularly in terms of their relevance to the life of the young woman reader in the new nation, who was addressed as the primary intended reader in not only these two novels but many other novels of the period. This study joins the existing scholarship on the relationship between women's lives in post-Revolutionary America and *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette*. More specifically, this study aims to identify within *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* a commentary about the discourse of women's self-discipline, which had a strong impact on women's lives in the early national period, by reviewing the function of a unique narrative structure that is found in both novels.

Because these works are the central focus of this project, a brief summary of each is in order. Charlotte Temple, the heroine of Rowson's novel, is an obedient daughter of virtuous parents and a student in a female boarding school. Her sheltered life begins to decline when she falls in love with a British soldier Montraville and follows him to America where he is sent to fight in the Revolutionary War. In America, Charlotte has no social identity except that of a "mistress" of a man who does not marry her as she believed he would. Through the ill-will of Belcour, Montraville's fellow officer and one of the novel's main villains, and Montraville's gullibility, Charlotte eventually becomes a pregnant pauper who dies in a working man's house in New York City, across the Atlantic from her parent's house. Eliza Wharton, the heroine of *The Coquette*, also has an unscrupulous man in her life who is eventually blamed by everyone in her acquaintance for her fall to disgrace. As a minister's daughter and as a woman of middling means but of exceptional wit, vivacity and education, Eliza figures as the center of social scenes in several cities in New England. However, during a period of temporary "freedom" that comes after the deaths of her father and her fiancé, Eliza meets Major Peter Sanford, who plays a primary role in putting her into the status of an old maid with a bad reputation. When Eliza is at her height in marriage eligibility, Sanford places himself in Eliza's house constantly and spoils every opportunity for her to accept proposals from other suitors. Then he marries another woman for her fortune, but still manages to persuade Eliza to meet with him and eventually makes her pregnant. As a result of this toxic relationship with Sanford, Eliza ends up dying in a remote tavern after giving birth to his stillborn child.

Critics of these two novels have argued that the two heroines' tragedies must have resonated with contemporaneous young women readers' anxieties regarding courtship and marriage, because making the right decision in those rites of passage was such a critical task for all young women in the early Republic. With the two novels dealing with such socially important themes as courtship and marriage, it seems natural that scholars have tried to explain

the popularity of *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* in their relation to the social context, especially women's social status, in the early national period.

I agree with this approach and argue that, among many types of relevance the two novels had to early American women readers' lives, the relation between the discourse of female self-discipline and the two novels is critical to understanding each work. After the Revolution, there was an enthusiasm for consolidating the new nation's ongoing independence and prosperity, and the period's print materials suggest that a majority of writers, many of them harboring republican ideas, promoted individual citizens' virtue as the essential element of a solid republic.¹ As a result, the theme of self-discipline, defined here as the practice of each individual guarding his or her own virtue, prevailed within the period's print materials. Any literate person in the early Republic was told by writers from various discourses that he or she should know and control his or her own body and mind so that reason is in control and irrational passions are subsumed. Even though men and women were urged to guard their virtue, women were endowed with special responsibilities as the ultimate guardians of virtue, because, as the theory went, women could not only guard their own virtue but also could inspire men to become virtuous. As a result, female self-discipline was particularly emphasized in many kinds of print materials: Poetry, stories and essays in periodicals, as well as advice tracts and fiction in book form called for women's self-control, detailing instructions on which qualities women should

¹ There has been a long-standing debate among historians about whether the political ideology in the period 1775-1815 can be explained solely by republicanism. Historians have been discussing this issue by finding signs of both republicanism and liberalism, among others, in diverse threads that constituted this fast-changing period of the nation. When I refer to the republican ideas of most writers in this period, I follow Jan Lewis's usage of the term in her study "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic." Acknowledging the scholarly discussion mentioned above, Lewis posits to use the term "republican" as people in late eighteenth-century America used it, that is, as a term that signifies "not only classical republicanism but also that fusion of civic humanism and evangelical ardor achieved by Americans at the eve of the Revolution," in which thought—belief—system the most cherished quality was "virtue, the self-sacrificial and disinterested quality that was prized in both sacred and secular traditions (690).

engender in themselves and what kind of regimen they had to follow to do so. Female self-discipline, in this way, became a national campaign with extra urgency in the early Republic; virtuous women could ensure the new nation's long-standing independence and prosperity, while corruption and degeneracy in women's character could directly spell doom for the fledgling republic.

Charlotte Temple and *The Coquette*, along with other seduction stories published and read in the period, have been extensively discussed in relation to this discourse of female self-discipline in the early Republic. This approach has good reason: to fall a victim to a man's seduction appears to be the foreseeable consequence of a woman's failure to master the much-emphasized self-regulation. One could easily apply the tone of the contemporaneous advice literature to these two novels and say, had Charlotte and Eliza only heeded the warnings and instructions in advice literature and behaved themselves in such a way that rakes like Montraville and Major Sanford would not have had a chance to slight them, they could have escaped the ordeals of social ignominy, physical and emotional pain, and scandalous death that they suffer.

Despite these notable parallels, the exact terms of relation between the two popular seduction novels and the discourse of female self-discipline have been an object of contention. The issue of whether seduction stories such as *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* served or subverted the message of female self-discipline was a debated issue even in late eighteenth-century America, when the popularity of seduction stories begun to provoke criticism from alarmed social elites. Early critics condemned seduction stories for galvanizing women's passion and fancy and urging them to breach the behavioral rules put upon women in the society. On the other hand, many authors of these stories themselves often argued in the prefaces or within the text that their stories were meant to supplement the mainstream discourse of women's self-regulation. The authors argued that their stories could better warn women readers of the dire consequences of transgressing codes of behavior with their

command of vivid description. Authors of early seduction stories also maintained that their stories had a better chance to be read by women readers more frequently because of fiction's power to pique readers' interest.

This debate on the relationship between early seduction stories and the discourse of female self-control has been repeated among modern literary scholars of early American literature. Critics such as Sarah Emily Newton and Karen Weyler argue that the early sentimental stories, many of them dealing with the theme of seduction, formed a more palatable venue where female self-discipline could be propagated to readers than in conduct literature that was more prescriptive and drier in delivery. However, Cathy Davidson has shown that, as narrative works which provided detailed descriptions of the characters' lives, seduction stories also had a potential to enlighten women readers regarding their own social status, especially how little influence they had on how their lives were to unfold. Seduction stories displayed simply too many a female character who struggles to meet tightly-woven codes of behavior while her whole personhood is judged according to how well she follows the rules of female propriety.² Each of these arguments has merit, which leads me to conclude that early seduction stories certainly had a close connection to the cultural emphasis on female self-regulation, but the exact terms of connection between the stories and the discourse is multi-dimensional and needs additional consideration.

In this study, I start with the premise that examining how the two novels present their messages about the discourse of women's self-control can elucidate what those messages are. That is, I attempt to join the scholarly discussion on the messages embedded in *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* about the discourse of women's self-control in late eighteenth-

² Even though all women across the boundaries of race and wealth shared their unprivileged legal and social status compared to men, not all women were expected to follow the strict paradigm of female propriety. For example, Sarah Emily Newton reports that the gender-specific conduct literature in the early Republic addressed "white, middle-class American women only, for the experiences of lower-class women and women of color were considerably different" (162).

century America, but approach the issue by focusing on the way Rowson and Foster experiment with the structure of their narratives. At the core of both *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* is the recognizable seduction plot, in which the heroine goes through a steady fall in social respectability as a result of succumbing to a man's seduction. However, Rowson and Foster convert this heroine-centered seduction plot to build their narratives in a parallel structure, in which an equal amount of focus is put on the heroine and the other characters. This parallel structure of the two novels gives us a key to understanding that Rowson and Foster use their respective novels not simply as a podium from which to deliver their messages. Rather, the two authors use the texts of *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* more as a narrative laboratory where they study a particular rhetoric within the discourse of women's self-discipline for its viability, and at the same time as a site where they display their study results.

Rowson and Foster particularly examine the rhetoric of rewards that writers used to promote women's self-discipline in late eighteenth century America. Writers of the conduct literature popular in late eighteenth century America promised two rewards to the woman who earnestly followed the regimen of female self-control: her acknowledgment as a morally independent individual, and her membership in a community of "friends" who would provide unreserved support for any woman who strived to regulate her mind and body. Writers who promoted women's virtue and self-discipline assured readers that it was possible for a woman to be the owner of her virtue through the control of her thoughts and actions, and crowned those women who succeeded as the indispensable contributors to the nation's stability. In addition, the period's advice literature promised women readers that they could attain moral support in their lifetime practice of self-regulation from "friends" or "mentors," the idealized figures in the genre who would function as external moral monitors, as well as emotional supporters.

Rowson and Foster study the viability of these two rewards presented in the literature of female propriety and demonstrate the result in their narratives. In *Charlotte Temple*, Rowson builds two subplots along with the main plot of seduction, wherein she displays how the promise

of moral autonomy and that of supportive friends and mentors are not likely to be attainable. Meanwhile, Foster focuses on the potential conflict between these two cultural models of the self-regulating woman and builds in *The Coquette* the situation of moral disagreement among self-regulating women that makes this conceptual conflict most visible. By analyzing the parallel structure of *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette*, I aim to elucidate how Rowson and Foster studied and questioned the reliability and logical cogency of the key rhetoric of rewards within the discourse of female self-discipline.

In Chapter 1, I set the context of the study by discussing in more detail the discourse of female self-discipline in post-Revolutionary America and the scholarship on the relationship between this cultural discourse and two popular seduction novels of the period, *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette*. The existing scholarship suggests that the two novels accommodate both the message supportive of the discourse of women's self-control and the effect to encourage the reader's reconsideration of the justness of socially prescribing women's proper behaviors that the discourse promoted. It means that, if we try to find the official stance of the two novels with respect to the discourse of female self-control, we can find both supportive and subversive messages in them, as existing scholarship demonstrates in detail. Thus, I turn my attention to a particular narrative structure of *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette*, arguing that reviewing the function of the parallel structure in the two novels helps us acknowledge the way Rowson and Foster examine in their narratives the rhetorical cogency of the discourse of female self-discipline rather than presenting one conclusive stance about it. Arguing that Rowson and Foster particularly comment on eighteenth-century conduct writers' rhetoric of rewards, I start the discussion by reviewing in the rest of Chapter 1 the two rewards conduct writers presented for the self-disciplining woman: moral autonomy and supportive friends and mentors.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I analyze *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* to decipher the comments Rowson and Foster embed in their narratives about these two promises for the self-regulating woman. In Chapter 2, I discuss *Charlotte Temple* and Rowson's use of the narrator

figure, who freely changes the pace and the direction of the narrative, to build two subplots along the main plot of seduction. One subplot consists of the moments when the narrator relays the heroine's confusion at other people's denigration of her morality, while uncharacteristically withholding the narrator's own comments. The other subplot is composed of the moments where the narrator digresses from the chronological main plot to present background information on the characters around the heroine and her seducer, thus forming what I call a "character exhibition." Rowson uses these two subplots to demonstrate the unreliability of the two promises for the self-disciplining woman presented in conduct literature. The moments that highlight Charlotte's confusion at other people's accusation of her moral laxity are presented in such a way as to raise the reader's doubt about whether a woman can ever be acknowledged as a morally independent individual, regardless of how long she practices self-discipline. Meanwhile, the plot of "character exhibition," in which the profiles of all potential mentor- and friend-figures in the story are presented, shows how not only vile characters, but well-intentioned adults, cannot function as effective mentors and friends to both the heroine and her young seducer, thus belying the promise of supportive mentors and friends for the self-disciplining woman.

While Rowson investigates whether each of the two promises for the self-regulating woman is viable, I study in Chapter 3 how Foster creates in *The Coquette* a situation which highlights the conflict between the two models of the ideal self-disciplining woman. One of the two models is a morally independent woman who has developed a firm inner moral monitor through years of self-discipline, with which she can discern virtuous thoughts and behaviors while remaining unaffected by external influences. The other is an obliging friend who follows her friends' and mentor's advice to change her thoughts and behaviors, even when she is reluctant to. Even though both models were presented in conduct writings popular in post-Revolutionary America, they could confuse a female practitioner of self-discipline especially in the occasion when she should find herself disagreeing with her respected female friends and

mentors on a moral issue. To follow the model of the morally independent woman, the woman reader should listen to the instructions of her own inner voice, yet another, conflicting model of the obliging friend teaches her to follow her friends and mentor's advice even if she does not agree with it.

Foster highlights in *The Coquette* this conceptual conflict between the two models of self-disciplining woman, and does so by creating in her novel the very situation of moral disagreement among self-disciplining women that brings this conflict to the surface. Using the epistolary form, Foster converts the heroine-centered seduction plot into a situation of arguments between the heroine and her female friends, which is represented through their letters. The letter form highlights the details of the disagreements between Eliza and her friends on the issue of the proper behavior of a single woman, while at the same time keeping the frame of female friendship that encompasses these correspondents. In that way, Foster delineates the interactions among these female friends not as contention between one aberrant woman and the morally upright friends who try to edify her. Rather, both the heroine and her female friends in *The Coquette* are displayed as a group of self-disciplining women who try to keep a balance between the two cultural models of self-regulating woman while wading their way through the unfamiliar territory of moral disagreement with friends they trust. In other words, by reformulating the seduction plot into interactions between the heroine and her female friends through juxtaposing their letters, Foster makes her female characters experience the confusion between the two models of the self-disciplining woman propagated through conduct literature in post-Revolutionary America, which a contemporaneous woman reader could well be experiencing herself.

This study examines *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* to find the embedded commentary about the rhetorical soundness of the discourse of female self-control. Even though I argue that *Charlotte Temple* points out the unavailability of each of the two promises conduct writers presented to promote female self-discipline, while *The Coquette* demonstrates

the conflict between them, to acknowledge these comments is only half of this study's purpose. I also aim to recognize the way Rowson and Foster felt free to explore and use the attributes of the fictional narrative form to accommodate their commentary, as much as the commentary itself. In other words, this study analyzes *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* to learn their observations about the cultural discourse of their time, as well as the narrative machinations working in them to enable the delivery of those messages. In the following chapter, I begin the discussion by reviewing the discourse of female self-discipline in late eighteenth-century America, and the key rhetoric of rewards within it, to introduce the object of the cultural commentary in *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette*.

CHAPTER 2
THE DISCOURSE OF FEMALE SELF-DISCIPLINE AND
THE RHETORIC OF REWARDS

Even though *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* have received much attention from scholars of early American literature, it has not been due to the originality of the two novels' subject matter. Stories about a young woman's seduction were staples in the early national print market, from both British and American sources. Even though Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748) enjoyed much popularity in America, the prevalence of the seduction plot in print materials in the new nation was not something to explain as a literary fad triggered by a couple of imported bestsellers.¹ As a result, the reason for the popularity of seduction stories in America in the period between 1789 and 1814 has been studied from various perspectives, constituting an important aspect of scholarship on early American literature.

One topic that has captured literary scholars' attention is the relation between seduction stories and the mainstream discourse of female self-discipline in the early national period. Self-discipline is an individual practice of constantly reviewing one's thoughts and actions and controlling them so that reason prevails and unruly passions are kept in order. This concept, with its root in John Locke's pedagogical theory of habitual self-discipline, developed into a prevailing discourse throughout the eighteenth century in western Europe and colonial America,

¹ Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa* were steadily read and praised for their edifying effect in America from the mid-eighteenth-century. By 1900, there were at least twenty American editions of Richardson's novels (Brown *The Sentimental Novel* 29). Critics also acknowledge the influence of Richardson's novels on American seduction novels such as the works of Susanna Rowson, Hannah Foster, Judith Sargent Murray and Tabitha Tenney (Bontatibus 2). For Richardson's influence on American novelists, see Brown, *The Sentimental Novel*, Chapter 2. For the colonial reception of *Clarissa*, see Mott 32, 38.

and continued to be propagated in various literary forms in America after the Revolution. Even though John Locke himself explains his pedagogy of self-discipline as a practice meant for boys in his *Some Thoughts concerning Education* (1693), the readers in post-Revolutionary America were met with magazine articles and advice texts insisting that female citizens' mastering of the practice of self-review and self-control was a matter of national importance (Weyler 37). Writers argued that the new republic's stability depended on individual virtue, particularly on women's virtue, because it was women who could persuade men to grow out of the unruly habits attained during their younger years and to cultivate virtue in themselves. According to this logic, women's self-discipline was important because the virtue thus nurtured in women through their self-control had a positive influence on the citizens of both sexes. Thus, early women readers were bombarded with advice texts on the particular theme of female self-discipline; the theme appeared in popular magazines and in conduct texts frequently presented to young women as gifts.

When we consider that successful self-discipline for a woman was equated with her adopting the domestic roles of daughter, wife and mother in the period's advice literature, we can deduce that part of the seduction stories' impact on contemporaneous readers was due to this mainstream discourse of female self-discipline. Readers who were well-versed in the premise that women were safest and most productive within the domestic realm, performing the socially prescribed roles of daughter, wife and mother, must have noticed how seduction stories featured women who were dramatically opposite from the model virtuous woman described in conduct texts. In other words, early readers could wring their hands and gasp properly at every juncture as the heroine falls for the seducer's words, only when they knew the paradigm of female self-control so thoroughly and thus understood how much farther and farther away the fictional heroine was drifting from the model of proper woman. Thus, it may be no surprise that seduction stories have been discussed in relation to the mainstream discourse of female self-control even among eighteenth-century readers, authors and critics. In addition, because of

their status as bestselling novels in the early Republic and the sources of such cultural icons as Charlotte Temple and Eliza Wharton, Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* and Foster's *The Coquette* have been almost always mentioned or closely analyzed in contemporary scholarship on this issue.²

This study builds on this long-standing association between the discourse of women's self-control and early seduction stories. Specifically, I examine the commentary about the discourse of female self-control that *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* stage in their narratives and their use of the popular seduction plot to build a venue for such a commentary. In this first chapter, I review the previous scholarship on this topic and explain the relation of my study to the previous studies before I move into detailed examinations of the two novels in the following chapters.

The campaign for women's self-discipline in post-Revolutionary America was based on the widely-held belief that the new nation's future prosperity relied on individual citizens' virtue. Virtue was regarded as "the most valued quality defining individual commitment to the American Republic cause" (Bloch 41), the primary asset on which national independence relied. Arguments such as "public good must grow out of private virtue" sums up the significance

² Both *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* are famous for the contemporaneous reader's enthusiastic response to them as if Charlotte Temple and Eliza Wharton were real-life figures. Foster's novel is known to be a fictional recount of the story of Elizabeth Whitman, whose unattended death in a remote tavern after childbirth was reported in numerous newspaper articles and sermons after her death in 1788. Cathy Davidson notes that Whitman's story was so well circulated that we may presume the readers of *The Coquette* already knew the outline of Whitman's life and found similarities between this historic figure and the heroine Eliza Wharton (*Revolution* 222). In Charlotte Temple's case, "thousands of nineteenth-century readers" commemorated her by visiting a grave in New York's Trinity Churchyard, believing that it contained the body of "poor Charlotte" (Davidson "Preface" xvi). Such contextual information testifies that readers in the post-Revolutionary period readily related to Charlotte Temple and Eliza Wharton, as if the heroine's experiences were their own.

eighteenth-century writers put upon individual virtue (qtd. in Lewis 700).³ As Jan Lewis has shown, even though both men and women were urged to promote virtue within themselves, women were singled out as having an exceptional power to expedite the national project of building a morally impervious republic. This was because women were considered to possess the power to influence men. The notion of “female influence” was prevalent in periodicals, an important venue through which political ideas were popularized to a growing reading public. Articles with titles such as “Female Influence,” “Scheme for Increasing the Power of the Fair Sex,” and “The Influence of the Female Sex on the Enjoyments of Social Life” frequent the pages of popular magazines in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century America (Lewis 701). According to these writers, women could exert a “reforming” power over men, inducing the finest “manly feeling” in them, through their encouragement of such qualities in their male suitors during the course of courtship; in addition, after marriage, the wife could continue helping her husband to preserve the virtues she had encouraged him to develop in the first place (Lewis 700-2). A young man in his speech at Columbia College’s commencement stressed that women could “mold the taste, the manners, and the conduct of her admirers, according to her pleasure” and encourage “noble passion with which the truly accomplished of the fair sex never fail of inspiring men,” which would cause “miraculous reformations” in men (qtd. in Lewis 700). Since women held such a strong moral impact on the whole population, writers declared, women’s virtue ensured the society’s “moral as well as its natural

³ Ruth Bloch explains that individual virtue was extolled in America from the Revolutionary period. The salience of the concept of virtue in the Revolutionary period was largely due to the fact that public virtue was a highly valued quality within classical republicanism. Bloch relays that the studies of historians such as Caroline Robbins, Bernard Bailyn, Gordon Wood and J. G. A Pocock have shown that classical republicanism—or the ancient republican theories that were revived “in the city-states of Italian Renaissance, then in seventeenth-century England” and kept alive by political dissidents in eighteenth-century England—provided the ideological background for the American Revolutionaries to conceptualize the American Revolution (40).

preservation,” while “there is not a more certain test of national depravity, than that which presents itself in the degeneracy of female manners” (qtd. in Lewis 700-701).

As can be expected from the cultural emphasis on women’s virtue, an abundance of written materials in post-Revolutionary America expatiated on how women should regulate their thoughts and actions, forming the discourse of female self-discipline. One rich venue in which instructions on women’s self-regulation was being disseminated was conduct literature. Despite some of the most famous works in the genre being often mistaken as “etiquette books,” Sarah Emily Newton explains that conduct literature is a literary genre that occupied a distinct place in the early Republic and thus requires its own definition.⁴ Newton defines conduct literature as “the texts which, aimed at an inexperienced young adult or other youthful reader, define an ethical, Christian-based code of behavior of life that normally includes gender role definitions” (“Wise and Foolish Virgins” 172). Both the reprinted editions of British texts and those written by Americans in this genre were printed in periodicals and in book form, and were compiled in various anthologies. Among the conduct texts that specifically addressed young women readers, Dr. John Gregory’s *A Father’s Legacy*, John Bennett’s *Letters to a Young Lady*, Hester Chapone’s *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* and James Fordyce’s *Sermons to Young Women* were frequently read or given as gifts to young women throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth century (Newton “Wise and Foolish Virgins” 163). Writers of popular conduct writings for women in this period inculcated in the woman reader that the finest aspect of her

⁴ In her study “Wise and Foolish Virgins,” Sarah Emily Newton distinguishes conduct literature from other books that impart various kinds of advice that have often been categorized together under the term of “advice books.” Newton points out that conduct literature she focuses on is different from other materials that deal with “education of women, homemaking, child rearing, civility and etiquette” (161). Newton also makes more fine-tuned distinctions between the terms “conduct” and “courtesy.” Quoting Michael Curtin’s statement that the courtesy genre “concerned itself with the advocacy of ideals of character, accomplishments, habits, manners, and morals—in short, the art of living in society” (Curtin 395), Newton states that conduct books focus more exclusively on promoting “behavioral and character formation” (Newton 162). Consult the same article for a list of important conduct books printed and reprinted in post-Revolutionary America (163).

character was her sensibility and the accompanying qualities such as “modesty, delicacy, [and] chastity” (Newton 144). Writers lectured that such sensibility of a woman could be manifested in its best form when she focused her attention to the task of supporting her husband, teaching conduct of virtuous life in her children, and keeping her house harmonious (Newton 143-5).

When the popularity of novels soared in the last decade of the eighteenth century, social elites immediately saw it as a threat to the message of female self-control. Cathy Davidson explains that social elites such as scholars, clerics and politicians in the early Republic vehemently denounced the new surge of fiction as the demand for “books of mere amusement” was quickly surpassing that for sermons and advice tracts (*Revolution* 104).⁵ Interestingly, even though seduction was not the only (if very popular) theme of fiction read in the period, critics warned that fictional stories seduced the woman reader away from the life of propriety. One “Leander” wrote in an 1802 essay that “novels [...] are the powerful engines with which the seducer attacks the female heart, and if we judge from every day experience, his plots are seldom in vain” (qtd. in Davidson *Revolution* 110). Similar moral accusations of fiction resounded in the early national period; stories with sensational themes such as seduction, incest, and suicide were condemned as a threat to the wholesome and patriotic campaign for female self-control.

⁵ Even though books were still expensive for many Americans to buy at the end of the eighteenth-century, Davidson explains that more and more readers could read books due to the rising literacy and the advent of the library system. Davidson writes that, the holdings and records of the libraries, especially circulating libraries the less affluent primarily used, show that it was novels that the widening reading public in post-Revolutionary America most ardently borrowed and read (*Revolution* 89). The editor of *New York Magazine* proclaimed in 1797 that “This is a novel-reading age” (qtd. in *Revolution* 102).

The surge of novels in late eighteenth-century America can be also gleaned from the rising voice of critics of the period censuring the genre. Davidson catalogues the criticism of novels from ministers, politicians, conservative writers and moral philosophers to demonstrate the threat social elites saw in the rising demand for novels. Davidson writes that this censure of novels had become weakened by 1814 when *Waverley* was published (*Revolution* 120). For the popularity of novels in eighteenth-century America, see also Winans.

A noticeable fact is that the authors of seduction stories defended their stories by completely reversing the critics' assessment; they argued that their stories promoted rather than threatened women's self-discipline in a more effective and wide-reaching way than didactic writings could ever do. A frequently mentioned example of such authorial defense is that of William Hill Brown's in the preface of his novel *The Power of Sympathy* (1789). The novel tells the story of two young lovers who find out too late that they are half-siblings, since the heroine was born as a result of the hero's father's seduction of her mother. The themes of seduction and near-incest loom large in the story and make it a likely target of critics who despised stories with sensational themes. However, Brown used his preface to label his story as educational material that taught female self-control:

Novels have ever met with a ready reception into the Libraries of the Ladies, but this species of writing hath not been received with universal approbation [...] Of the Letters before us, it is necessary to remark, that [...] the dangerous Consequences of SEDUCTION are exposed, and the Advantages of FEMALE EDUCATION set forth and recommended. (7)

The difference of opinion on the relation between early seduction stories and the discourse of women's self-discipline evident in these eighteenth-century sources has been repeated among modern literary critics as well, even though the reasoning behind the arguments has changed. One group of scholars has essentially located seduction stories as their authors professed them to be, that is, as reading materials that inculcated female self-discipline in those young women readers who would not read drier advice texts. Sara Emily Newton and Karen Weyler are among this group of scholars. In her study, *Intricate Relations*, Weyler devotes a chapter to specifically examining the connection between the period's epistolary novels, which usually include the seduction theme, and the established discourse of self-discipline. Weyler writes that, although conduct texts for women were published and circulated in large numbers, it was fictional stories in letter form that readers read most avidly,

presumably because these stories converted the motifs of courtship and seduction into personal letters written in a relatable, vernacular, and personal language. Weyler argues that writers chose to write epistolary fiction from the essentially didactic intention of teaching self-control to women readers through a more palatable venue. One piece of the evidence for the essentially didactic motivation of early fiction writers is how the authors discuss influential conduct texts that advocate individual self-control in their stories during moments when the main characters are tested for self-discipline. Several allusions to conduct literature appear in *The Power of Sympathy*, for example, as if to remind the reader how the characters are supposed to behave in morally trying situations.⁶

Sarah Emily Newton also explains early seduction novels as a means for writers to propagate female self-control in a form that could attract more readers. Newton writes that:

Novelists and conduct writers were to some degree in the same business—the constructing of a version of reality which dramatized the possibilities, limits, and consequences of female behavior. Conduct books supplied the typology upon which engaging fiction could be hung. The dramatic tension of good and evil, the interplay of the sexes, the danger of seduction, the suspenseful possibility of the happy ending complete with the ideal of “rational” marriage—or not, if the heroine misbehaved—this is the very stuff of which Richardson’s *Clarissa Harlowe* and *Pamela* were made. (146)

⁶ In *The Power of Sympathy*, the virtuous matron Mrs. Holmes sends Myra Harrington a copy of *A Lady of Quality’s Advice to Her Children*, a popular advice tract of the period and what Mrs. Holmes calls one of the English books that “speaks the language of the heart and that inculcates the duty we owe to ourselves, to society and the Deity” (53). In “Introduction,” Carla Mulford writes that this strategy of mentioning famous advice tracts throughout his novel is “a doubly intensive strategy” in this book that “itself claims to purvey education about conduct.” According to Mulford, “[b]y providing a layer of text from a popular advice book in the middle of his own novel giving advice, Brown could lay claim to his book’s edifying function while providing the very edification he sought to render fictionally” (xxxix).

In light of Newton's view, what difference seduction stories have from conduct texts can be regarded as dramatic embellishments, at the base of which lie the same basic tenets of women's self-control.

While Weyler and Newton focus on the similarities between conduct texts and seduction stories, Cathy Davidson underscores the fact that seduction stories captured aspects of women's lives that conduct texts did not. In Davidson's view, the drama that centers on the heroine in seduction stories makes a much greater impact on readers than as simple fictional embellishments around the message of female propriety. Instead, Davidson argues that the details of how the heroine comes to meet a seducer, why she falls for his words and eventually abandons her home, family, and friends "tease the reader into thought" about how poorly the message of female self-discipline served the living women represented in the heroine (*Revolution* 230). Conduct texts do not hesitate to predict women's lives as either the blissful life rewarded to virtuous women or the painful one given as a punishment to those who violate rules of propriety.⁷ However, what if a woman in effect does not have much influence on how her life transpires, whether she strives to conform to the socially sanctioned behavioral paradigm or not? Davidson encourages us to recognize how early seduction stories function as galleries of various women's lives that decidedly belie the formula of "reward for virtue, punishment for vice" posited in conduct literature. If that principle holds in real life, why does virtuous and wealthy widow Mrs. Morley in Sally Wood's *Dorval* have to find out that her new husband is "a fortune hunter, a bigamist, and a murderer?" (qtd. in *Revolution* 216). Not only did writers present virtuous women punished through unfortunate marriages, but they also presented ample excuses for women who are tempted into infidelity. Samuel Relf's *Infidelity, or the Victims of Sentiment* relates the story of Caroline Courtney, a young wife who forms an emotional bond with another young man, but with the explanation of how Caroline married elderly Mr. Franks

⁷ Sarah Emily Newton explains that the rule of "obedience/happiness versus disobedience/misery formula" pervaded conduct literature for women widely read in post-Revolutionary America (145).

because of her parents' assertion and against her wishes (*Revolution* 216). Davidson argues that early seduction stories highlighted the scanty influence women had over their own lives, and revealed how conduct writers' promise of reward to self-regulating women was groundless. In Davidson's view, seduction stories urged readers to see the part of reality that conduct texts obscured through their list of injunctions.

Both arguments are tenable as explanations of early seduction stories, because both sides focus on the characteristics of seduction stories as their supporting evidence. The critics who regard seduction stories as a more palatable version of the message of female self-control, and essentially the same as in conduct texts, focus on how authors express their intention to educate readers in self-discipline and include allusions to conduct texts in the middle of their stories. Davidson, who detects in seduction stories a tacit criticism of the mainstream discourse of female self-control, also finds supporting evidence for her argument within the texts of seduction stories, in her case emphasizing that the detailed portrayals of women's lives in the stories reveal the restrictions women had to bear in a society that insisted upon female virtue. It might be that both modes of relation, the supplementary and the subversive, together constitute the multi-dimensional relation that early seduction stories formed with contemporaneous conduct texts and their message of female self-discipline.

This study focuses on the novels, *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette*, and examines the way the authors Susanna Rowson and Hannah Foster exhibit the fallacy of the two key promises within the discourse of female self-discipline, women's moral autonomy and the membership in a community of friends. Despite the prescriptive tone of much conduct literature, the discourse of women's self-control in the early national period was not entirely composed of rules, orders, and injunctions. Writers just as enthusiastically promised rewards for those women who succeeded in mastering self-review and self-regulation. Two of these rewards were an acknowledgment of the woman as a morally independent individual and her promised membership in a community of friends and mentors who would support her along the life-long

process of self-discipline. Conduct writers idealized women who mastered self-discipline as individuals who could not only examine and overhaul their own moral status but could also influence men around them to strive for moral lives, crowning such self-regulating women as the bedrock of the new republic. In addition, conduct writers encouraged readers to find “friends” and “mentors” who would assist those female practitioners of self-discipline by acting as monitors and supporters, and presented models of such female friendships through anecdotes in their texts.

I argue that, in *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette*, the authors Rowson and Foster urge the reader to reconsider the reliability of these two promises for the self-disciplining woman. My focus is similar to Davidson’s in that it pays attention to how the fictional mode enabled early writers to run a current cultural paradigm through a viability test, and arrive at a negative conclusion. The difference between my argument and Davidson’s lies in where I locate the commentary about the discourse of female self-control in the two novels. Davidson attributes the effect of evoking the reader’s reconsideration of the principles of female self-control to the seductions story’s ability to describe women’s lives in detail and with realism, which is an asset that comes from these works being novels.⁸ By contrast, I identify within *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* the authors’ more overt and structural endeavor to examine the soundness of the discourse of women’s self-control by testing the viability of a key rhetoric within the discourse, that is, the rhetoric of rewards. In the rest of Chapter 1, I discuss in more

⁸ In the book chapter titled “Ideology and Genre,” Davidson adopts Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory about the specific characteristic of the novel as a genre to explain the reason why the rising popularity of novels in the early Republic must have been a threat to the social elites. Bakhtin argues in his article “Epic and Novel” that “there always remains an unrealized surplus of humanness” in the novel, which leads the reader to “change the nature of his own image (there is a new and higher type of individualization of the image)” (qtd. in *Revolution* 108). Davidson adds that the novel similarly “subjects the forms of the society in which it is written and read (and the writings that support those forms) to review,” which Davidson surmises may have been a reason why the novel was considered as a threat to the privileged in the early Republic (*Revolution* 108).

details the two promises for the self-disciplining woman presented in eighteenth-century conduct literature, before reviewing in Chapters 2 and 3 how *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* demonstrate the unavailability of and the conflict between these two promises for the virtuous woman.

At first glance, it is not readily imaginable that the writers of conduct texts for women in the early Republic ever intended to *coax* their readers into lives of virtue and self-discipline. The injunctions in those conservative texts are frequently very direct and even harsh in their descriptions of what a virtuous woman should or should not do. Consider some of the examples: “Be courteous to your Neighbors, learn in silence of your Husbands and spiritual Guides, read good Books, pray often, and speak little;” “The care of her family is her whole delight, to that alone she applieth her study;” “Your business chiefly is to read Men, in order to make yourselves agreeable and useful” (qtd. in Newton 143-144). These excerpts from the most widely-read conduct texts in post-Revolutionary America share a bluntness and confidence in their declaration of the woman’s area of attention (her family), her role (an “agreeable and useful” companion to her husband), and the qualities that she should always embody (the list presented in Steele’s *The Lady’s Library*, the first quote above). The uncompromising tone of instruction in conduct texts raises a question about how the women readers in post-Revolutionary America reacted to such prescriptive lectures, because historians have shown us that many women during the Revolutionary War had had the opportunity to take on responsibilities traditionally undertaken by men and, as a result, showed varying degrees of awareness about how the assumption of limited capacity and roles of women did not fit what women could and had achieved in real life.

This heightened self-awareness after the War in fact caused discontent in some of the women who could not accept that their contributions during the Revolution did not change their subservient status in the new Republic. Even though “liberty” and “independence” were advocated as the most important essence of the new nation, women after the Revolution

essentially remained as underprivileged as they had been during the colonial days. Davidson explains that the most telling evidence of women's vulnerable situation in the early Republic was their legal status of "feme sole" and "feme covert," the status of the single woman and the married woman respectively that is entirely represented by either her father or her husband.⁹ Davidson explains that the experience of surviving with their family's livelihood as intact as possible during the Revolutionary War impacted women in America in two ways: first, many women reached the realization that they were capable of managing farming or trade, duties that were outside the traditional undertakings of women; second, many married women became acutely aware how their legal status of "feme covert" made it practically impossible for them to manage business without circumventing the law (*Revolution* 194). A woman could not make any legal contracts, and if her husband died on the battlefield, she could barely save her household from destitution without bending the law or seeking the help of male relatives. As a result, even though women's disadvantaged legal status did not change substantially after the Revolutionary War, evidence shows that their experiences during the war left some women discontent with their vulnerable social and legal status.¹⁰

⁹ An unmarried woman was legally counted as her father's property, and when she married, her legal rights were merely transmitted from her father to her husband. A woman's property was subsumed into her husband's possessions upon marriage and she could not thereafter write a will or inherit property for herself, and her signature meant nothing on legal documents (Davidson *Revolution* 193-5). For women's legal status in the early Republic, see Davidson, *Revolution*, Chapter 6; Kerber, Chapter 5. For a more general survey of New England women's lives between 1780 and 1830 based on women's personal writings, see Cott.

¹⁰ While Davidson and Kerber highlight the limited political, economic and social agency of women in post-Revolutionary America, Susan Branson focuses on how women found for themselves more diverse public roles in this period than the notion of "separate spheres" suggests. In her study *These Fiery Frenchified Dames*, Branson traces how elite and middle-class white women in early national Philadelphia took advantage of newly-developing venues such as printed materials, theatre and salons to "participate in the politics and culture of the day, initiate a discussion of [women's] place in American society, and develop a consciousness as an important constituency for the competing political parties" (3).

When we consider women's discontent at the new nation's failure to acknowledge their contributions made and their capabilities proven during the war, we come to question how conduct texts, which ordered women to be content to manage their households and attend to their husbands and children in so sure and blunt a manner, could still be popular in America after the Revolutionary War? What could have motivated those women who already had grown displeased with the roles and behavioral rules ascribed to their gender to still read, give to others as presents and talk about popular conduct texts as they apparently did, judging from the multiple editions and anthologies of conduct texts circulated in this period?

To answer this question, we should take into consideration the advantages women could expect from proving themselves willing and able to follow all the rules enumerated in the print discourse of female self-regulation. Scholarship on the print materials in the early national period helps us understand that women could expect two advantages when they answered the call for female self-control. First, women could prove themselves as independently virtuous and by that means declare themselves as competent citizens of the republic. Secondly, women could also expect membership in a community of "friends" and "mentors" who, various conduct texts suggested, would be there to provide women with disciplinary as well as emotional support.

One reason why a young woman may have pored over the instructions in Fordyce's *Sermon* or Dr. Gregory's *Legacy* is because she believed that, by doing so, she could be acknowledged as a morally independent person, an ideal promoted in the late eighteenth-century as the model citizen of the new Republic. After the Revolution, many American writers instilled in early readers the idea that Americans deserved and could maintain their newly gained national independence because each individual American was capable of maintaining his or her own virtue autonomously, without any other party's help. The model of independently virtuous individual was circulated and repeatedly idealized in the early national print public as

the true citizen contributive to lasting national independence and stability.¹¹ Even though moral autonomy is a quality that is hard to prove, writers in post-Revolutionary America found a theoretical base for the model of the independently virtuous American in the imported discourse of self-discipline. Having a root in John Locke's pedagogical theory, self-discipline is a theory that an individual can control his or her virtue through the tangible and methodical practice of self-review and self-regulation. After its introduction in Locke's *Some Thoughts concerning Education* (1693), the concept developed into a culture-wide discourse of self-discipline that appeared in philosophical, educational, medical and religious discussions in western Europe and colonial and post-Revolutionary America throughout the eighteenth-century (Weyler 33). Particularly, self-discipline gained a wide attention in post-Revolutionary America as a method with which an individual could maintain his or her virtue without others' help.

When Locke introduced his theory of habitual self-discipline in *Education*, this seemingly restrictive message of constant self-monitoring and self-regulation was provocative, because the principle manifests that virtue is not an inborn quality but is formed through experiences, and that each individual can keep him or herself virtuous through conscientious effort. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke posits that a human mind is like a blank sheet without any pre-encoded knowledge or characteristics, which are formed only after birth through the sense experiences he attains in the world and through the generalization of those experiences.¹² Locke's pedagogy of habitual self-discipline is based on

¹¹ In "The Republican Wife," Jan Lewis explains how periodical articles on "the republican marriage" prevalent in the early national period promoted individual moral autonomy as the prerequisite for contributive citizens of the new Republic. For the transition of the concept of "virtue" from the Revolutionary period to the early national period, see Bloch.

¹² In his 1690 study *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Locke posits that a person's mind when he is born is like a blank sheet without any inborn ideas; the mind then gathers sensory information such as solidity, extension, figure, motion, number, color, texture, order and taste, and forms ideas only through generalizations of such sensory information. In this theory, the ideas and patterns of behavior that constitute a person entirely depend on the kind of experiences the person has had in his life, especially in childhood when the foundation of the mind is formed. This view of the human mind as dependant solely

this experiential viewpoint toward the human mind. As with any other human characteristics, Locke argues that virtue can also be ingrained in a person (whom he designates as male) only when he is exposed to virtuous thoughts and behaviors repeatedly, and preferably from childhood before he mingles in the world where virtue and vice coexist. If a child is exposed to only virtuous thoughts and actions from early on and is guided to make habits of them, he grows up to be an adult in possession of ingrained habits of virtue, which are manifested in his thoughts and behaviors, and help him discern virtue from vice both in worldly experiences and in his own mind. Thus, in Locke's theory, self-discipline is an end result of years of guidance and exposure to, and habituation of, selective and morally sound experiences.

For the purpose of my study, what is important from Locke's theories is the idea that self-discipline is also a testament that the person who can practice it has already internalized virtuous habits so thoroughly that he can rely on his own reason or "inner governor" in his judgment and practice of virtue. In other words, the ultimate goal of Locke's pedagogy of habitual self-discipline is to grow an adult who is capable of keeping himself virtuous without any other person's help. Locke writes that "he that is good, a virtuous and able Man" should be guided by "Habits woven into the very Principles of his Native," which would enable him to act and be virtuous naturally even when he is not consciously directing every detailed action and thought (qtd. in Weyer 36). Such an adult, who has attained "Reason of [his] own guide" (qtd. in Fliegelman 14), can be trusted to be virtuous in his own judgment and behaviors. Thus, even in the seminal study that introduced the concept, self-discipline was conceptualized as a practical method for as well as the proof of an individual's moral autonomy, his ability to judge and practice virtue on his own.

When we consider how individual moral autonomy was idealized as the quintessential American quality, it is not hard to understand the popularity of the concept of self-discipline in

upon the senses lies at the basis of Locke's pedagogy in *Education* and adds a sense of urgency to childhood education, especially to moral education. See Fliegelman, Chapter 1.

post-Revolutionary America. A person who could guard his or her own virtue without others' help was already established as the ideal citizen figure in the rhetoric of independence. Self-discipline is a declaration that it is possible for an individual to guard his or her virtue through conscientious effort, and it is also a method a person can follow to achieve sovereignty over his or her morality. To writers, self-discipline must have been a concept that proved that the idealized figure of the morally independent American was realistic, as well as providing a tangible regimen through which American readers could transform themselves into the highly-acclaimed, independently virtuous citizens they were supposed to be. As a result, in the period between 1789 and 1814, the rallying voice for self-monitoring and self-regulation was ubiquitous in the American print public, appearing in written materials in as diverse discourses as medicine, philosophy, religion, education and fiction, addressing both men and women (Weyler 33).

Conduct writers expressed an expectation that self-discipline would engender morally independent people who could safeguard their own virtue. For example, prestigious minister Enos Hitchcock writes in his sermon, *A Discourse on Education* (1785), that without educating children from early on in the practice of self-discipline, "the rising generation would grow up uninformed and without principle; their ideas of freedom would degenerate into licentious independence; and they would fall a prey to their own animosities and contentions" (qtd. in Weyler 34). With early habituation to self-discipline, Hitchcock writes that Americans can expect the next generations to be able to "think rationally and soberly on subjects of moral duty, and Christian faith [...] [and] able to enquire candidly after truth and determine, impartially, what is their duty" (qtd. in Weyler 34). In the writings about self-discipline, people who have mastered self-discipline eventually do not need external authority to interfere with their virtue; rather, the outer boundary, the nation, was to benefit from the moral status of these self-purifying, self-regulating individuals. Self-disciplining people were idealized as morally independent people in America, as Locke envisioned in his *Education* more than one hundred years before.

It is noteworthy that, however disadvantaged women were in real life, they were always included in this picture of ideal American citizens who could autonomously maintain virtue to support the nation from the bottom up. As I discussed earlier, the emphasis on female self-discipline went hand in hand with the emphasis on female influence on the overall moral status of the republic. When the entire male and female population were encouraged to become morally independent people through reviewing and regulating themselves, and when women were singled out as having the potential to be particularly influential through their reforming power over men, then there is no reason to presuppose that all women in post-Revolutionary America were suffocated by the rules and injunctions about women's self-discipline. Rather, a fair number of women could have been determined to train themselves to internalize the rules of self-discipline and be recognized by others as the "virtuous woman." It is true that the conduct literature for women often so bluntly declared women reader's roles to be far more constricted than women themselves knew they were capable of. However, for those women who decided to be recognized as the most influential figures, at least in the realm of morality, conduct texts for all their haughty tone may have been still worth studying as manuals of a sort. That is, women readers may have studied Dr. Gregory's or Reverend Fordyce's books to learn how to polish themselves in self-discipline, which was praised as the surest method for and sign of a person's moral autonomy. This promise of helping women readers to prove their moral autonomy and social function must have been a significant draw that made women readers voluntarily strive to fit themselves to the instructions of self-discipline in conduct texts.¹³

¹³ It is true that the idealized model of the virtuous woman after the Revolution simultaneously represented a potential for women's political agency as well as the limited extent of it. For example, Kerber explains that the notion of "the Republican Mother," the virtuous matron who was competent to teach her children civic duty and virtue, was an ingenious model devised in the early Republic that justified women's political role via their influence on their children. However, the Republican Mother was also considered to not seek for active participation in political actions such as legislation. This suggests that the model set the limit to women's political agency it justified, acknowledging only indirect political influence of women as acceptable. However, we can speculate that the model of the virtuous woman, despite its limited nature,

In addition, conduct texts promised to early women readers another attractive reward for actively practicing self-discipline: a membership in a community of loyal and honest friends. “Friend” and “mentor” are the terms that stand out in conduct texts full of instructions and rules as the terms used for allies who were to help the reader through the laborious process of self-regulation. The way writers explain “true friends” in conduct texts is enthusiastic enough to make any reader think one could not possibly succeed in a life of self-discipline without a proper friend. For example, the speaker of *Advice from a Lady of Quality to Her Children* emphasizes that “there is nothing, my children, more agreeable or useful to mankind than friendship: without this, the happiest life leaves a vacuum which can never be filled. There are a thousand cases in which we have need of counsel or assistance; a thousand situations in which we derive comfort from the sight of a friend: he is a support in our adversity; a MENTOR, to recall our wandering steps” (qtd. in Weyler 45). The last suggestion of the friend’s role—“a MENTOR, to recall our wandering steps”—indicates the underlying expectation that the reader find in her friends not only allies who offer emotional intimacy and comfort but stern teachers who can constantly scrutinize the thoughts and actions of the reader, judge their propriety, and let the reader know their opinions. Conduct writers advise ultimate openness to true friends, because friends are the only source who will help the reader by admonishments and always do so with a sincere intention to help.

The promise of supportive and morally uplifting friendship may have motivated many young women in the early Republic to a life of self-discipline. Young women living in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century America were in need of female friends. As the parental authority over their children’s decision-making had been decreasing from the mid-eighteenth-century, young women transitioning from the end of childhood to marriage—what Davidson calls “a premarital state”—relayed their questions increasingly to their sisters, who

still had the power to motivate young women to practice self-discipline, considering the prevalence of the writings insisting on female virtue read and taught during the period. For the model of the Republican Mother, see Kerber, Chapter 9.

shared similar concerns (*Revolution* 188).¹⁴ More importantly, the increase in the institutions for young women such as boarding schools and seminaries also made female friends both more available and more important for young women to get through those transition years. Virginia Lee Schiller-Chambers explains that women turned to sisters and female friends rather than to parents to solicit “a sense of shared values, for understanding of their particular experience, for clarification of expectations about the future, and for recognition and support in attaining their goals” (qtd. in Pettengill 187). In these circumstances, the sincere and morally adequate friendship explained in conduct texts as a reward for self-discipline must have appealed to young women readers seeking for social relations who could truly support them.

Writers also presented fictional models of such ideal communities of female friends, spreading the belief that supportive friendship already abounded for those women who decided to practice self-discipline in their lives. Female mentor-mentee relationships and mutually confiding and monitoring female friends appear frequently in novels in the early republic intended for young women. For example, in Brown’s *The Power of Sympathy*, Mrs. Holmes gives constant advice to young Myra, while Emily Hamilton diligently relates her trials and errors in reading the character of men to her friends in Sukey Vickery’s *Emily Hamilton* (1803). Mrs. Vigillius’s education of her charge Margaretta through a close inspection of the young woman’s development through daily letter exchange in Judith Sargent Murray’s *The Story of Margaretta* (1798) is the author’s ambitious attempt to construct and present the perfect relation between mentor and mentee, one that is as inauthoritative as between any affection-bound friends and as morally desirable as any teacher-student pair would dream of. Hannah Foster’s *The Boarding School* (1798) presents another ideal model of friendship that “the Lady of Quality” would approve. This work of “conduct fiction” features correspondence between Mrs. Williams, a mentor figure who runs a female finishing school, Harmony Grove, and one group of

¹⁴ For the changes in familial relations and the decrease in parental authority in eighteenth-century America, see Fliegelman; Yazawa.

graduates from her school who keep exchanging letters with their former teacher and with one another even after graduating and returning to their respective homes.¹⁵ What is striking in this work is the lack of discord among the correspondents, when they discuss life events and the lives of neighbors they observe. Mrs. Williams relays anecdotes of various female figures, some making wise choices and others failing to do so, to give lessons to her younger correspondents. Her students all internalize these lessons, and when they relay their lives and their neighbors' lives in letters, their tone and standard of judgment bear striking resemblances to their mentor's and, understandably, to one another's. Such portraits of harmonious friendship among women may have led contemporaneous women readers to think of self-discipline not as a lonely act but a practice that could be performed in a group, in which one could expect honest advice and emotional support from sincere friends who thought in the same way and with whom one could always ultimately reach an agreement.

To be acknowledged as a morally independent person and to have supportive friends who would monitor and judge but not abandon their friends—these two prospects may have been alluring enough to motivate a young woman to practice self-discipline as the best skill-set she could develop to prepare for the most respectable life in post-Revolutionary America. However, even though the promise of moral autonomy and that of supportive friendship were given with certainty in each writing in which they appeared, a list of questions could be asked about these hypothetical rewards for women's self-discipline: Exactly how many women were acknowledged as such morally independent arbiters of virtue in real life? And, how many women had access to moral supporters around them?

In addition, there was a potential conflict between the image of a firm inner moral monitor and the direction to a moral woman to unconditionally follow the advice of those

¹⁵ In "Wise and Foolish Virgin," Newton recognizes certain writings in the early Republic that were "a literary hybrid which cast acceptable conduct precepts in the form of the admittedly appealing narrative" as "conduct fiction," and analyzes Susanna Rowson's *Mentoria* (1791) and Hannah Foster's *The Boarding School* as representative works of this group of stories (146).

external monitors. In other words, a woman reader of the literature of female virtue in late eighteenth-century America was told to emulate two models of self-disciplining woman which directed her to two potentially conflicting moral standards. Thus, the two promises for the self-disciplining woman in conduct literature, even though both of them were propagated widely in the early nation's print public, entailed unanswered questions about the attainability of each of them as well as a conceptual conflict between them.

It is in this context that it becomes meaningful to regard *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* as more than stories about seduced women's sufferings. When we turn our attention from the seduction motif to the narrative structure of the two novels, we find that they resourcefully use the fictional narrative form to evaluate the viability of these two promised rewards for female self-discipline. *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* convert the popular plot of a young woman's seduction into a parallel structure where equal focus is put on the heroine and the characters around her. By doing so, Rowson and Foster use their narratives to address those questions about the availability of and the conflict between the two promises of conduct discourse. When we consider the prevalence of the discourse of female self-discipline in the post-Revolutionary period, the presence of this examination of the promises of female self-discipline in the two novels is all the more meaningful because it elucidates the function of seduction stories as a venue wherein authors actively studied the mainstream discourse of female self-discipline and demonstrated the result.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I analyze *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* to find out how Rowson and Foster modify their narratives to evaluate the rhetoric of rewards in the discourse of female self-discipline. In Chapter 2, I review how Rowson uses the narrator to create two subplots in *Charlotte Temple*, which she uses to question the promise of moral autonomy and that of helpful friends and mentors. In Chapter 3, I examine *The Coquette* to learn how Foster reveals the conflict within the rhetoric of rewards for self-regulating woman. Foster uses the epistolary form to convert the heroine-centered seduction plot into a moral argument between

the heroine and her female friends. Finding themselves disagreeing with one another on a moral issue, Eliza and her friends face the conflict between the two cultural models of self-disciplining woman, the woman who listens to her inner monitor and a loyal member of female friendship who follows her friends' advice unconditionally. By staging a large portion of the seduction plot through the format of correspondence between female friends, Foster makes her characters reflect the confusion an avid female reader of conduct literature after the Revolution may well have experienced from the rhetorical flaw within the discourse of women's self-control.

In the following chapter, I begin the discussion by analyzing *Charlotte Temple*. Even though the narrator in this novel is often identified with the author herself, I regard the narrator as a textual device that Rowson uses to create two subplots wherein she examines the two promises of female self-discipline one by one. Thus the focus in the next chapter is put on the way the narrator creates the two subplots, and how each of them is devoted to proving the unavailability of the promise of moral autonomy and that of supportive friends and mentors that the self-regulating woman reader in post-Revolutionary America was led to expect as rewards.

CHAPTER 3
CHARLOTTE TEMPLE

In this chapter, I discuss the contribution *Charlotte Temple* makes to the discourse of female self-discipline. The focus in this analysis is how Susanna Rowson uses the device of the narrator figure to install two subplots in her main narrative, which is seemingly built around a single focus on the heroine's predicaments. The central thread in the narrative of *Charlotte Temple* is the chronological report of events that happen to Charlotte from the moment she meets Montraville and his friend Belcour to the moment Mademoiselle La Rue, the main villainess who coaxes Charlotte to become Montraville's mistress, dies, ten years after Charlotte's own tragic death. This main thread of the narrative does recount the events that happen to Charlotte and Montraville in a chronological order.

However, when we focus on the narrator's delivery style, we find out that the narrator freely changes the pace of her narration to "linger" at certain moments, and also adds information about characters as digressions when it is not specifically required in the main narrative. These moments where the narrator takes time to elaborate or provides certain characters' background information are noteworthy for our study because the narrator's aberration from the main narrative constitutes two subplots which contain the novel's commentary on the discourse of female self-discipline. One such subplot follows the heroine's initiation to her social status as an object of external moral assessment and the other takes the form of what I call "a character exhibition." These two subplots are worth our attention because they consist of the moments when the two promises of female self-discipline—moral autonomy and supportive mentors and friends for a self-disciplining woman—are challenged.

In the "Author's Note," the narrator writes that her story is not "the effusion of Fancy" but "a reality," and that she has "thrown over the whole [story] a slight veil of fiction, and substituted names and places according to [the narrator's] own fancy" (xlix). However, the narrator's presence in the text does not stop at relating true events with mere changes of proper nouns. Rather, the text of *Charlotte Temple* is entirely consumed by the narrator's presence so that it is not an exaggeration to state that the narrator is the narrative. The narrator sets the pace of the storytelling; she chooses which scenes to elaborate and which to skip over. And, as often noted, the narrator of *Charlotte Temple* is famous for the lengthy, digressive comments that she adds at whichever point in the main narrative she deems necessary, even when the main narrative does not seem to require such comments.

What is the effect of having such a narrator, who changes the pace of narration and digresses freely? In many studies that focus on the narrator's function in *Charlotte Temple*, the narrator is explained as the textual manifestation of the author. In such an approach, the forward and overbearing presence of the narrator enables the most effective delivery of the author's message in the medium of printed text.¹ Many of these critics particularly focus on the narrator's treatment of the heroine to decipher the author's message. For example, Julia Stern focuses on how the narrator continually presents Charlotte's plight to the reader and also always presents herself at those moments by continual and even obtrusive comments. In Stern's view, the narrator's obsessive retelling of Charlotte's story functions to transform the text into a site where the narrator and the reader can connect and together go through a kind of psychological healing process. By constant presentation of Charlotte's pain, the narrator tries to convert young women readers temporarily into daughter figures who mourn their loss of a

¹ Rowson's dynamic career as a prolific writer of numerous plays, songs, poems, novels, and textbooks, a school founder and the president of the Boston Fatherless and Widows' Society makes it persuasive to draw a parallel between the author of *Charlotte Temple* and its narrator, who proclaims her wide-ranging knowledge of the world and assumes the voice of a moral lecturer throughout the story. For Rowson's biographical information and its relation to her written works, see Parker.

mother through identifying with the heroine. At the same time, by equally persistently making her presence known to the reader through her comments at the very moments when the reader is likely to sympathize with Charlotte's sorrow at losing contact with her mother, the narrator consoles the reader's invoked sorrow by her own motherly presence in the text. Stern finds in this textual pattern the novel's cultural work to imagine a new country that overcomes the losses and pains experienced during the Revolution. She writes:

Thus, the fabric of narrative, rent by the death of Charlotte and rewoven by the audience's compassionate response both inside the novel and outside in the world of history, becomes Rowson's abiding utopian figure for the new nation itself. [...] The sacrifices exacted by the Revolution—symbolized by Charlotte Temple—and the work of mourning they inspire thus allow for the reimagining of the American polity as a body that is both more cohesive and more inclusive than its pre-Revolutionary avatar precisely because it is grounded in the sympathetic affective relations of its members. (37)

Thus, in Stern's study, the narrator's way of handling the heroine's story and forming a relation with the reader is the key to understanding the cultural work *Charlotte Temple* performs.

Not all critics identify the narrator's position regarding the text and the reader as that of an all-encompassing mother and a visionary of the new nation as Stern does. Even though many critics still focus on the narrator's position toward the heroine to deduce the novel's message, other critics find the narrator occupying different positions relative to the heroine and addressing the reader with different agendas. For example, Marion Rust argues that *Charlotte Temple* is composed of the narrator's "survival lesson" to the specific group of white, middle- and upper-class, young American women with the heroine as the fictional stand-in for those readers. According to Rust, the narrator exhorts the reader to understand that it is Charlotte's inability to act on her desire to dissociate herself from immoral people that drives her into misery. This emphasis on the heroine's desire had a particular relevance to American women

readers after the Revolution. In the last decade of the eighteenth-century, young white women in the mid- to upper-class in America found themselves in a difficult position. Dynamic changes in political, economic and social realms called for an individual who was in control of one's own person and showed resoluteness in one's actions and thoughts enough to take advantage of increasing opportunities in and around the new nation. However, as if to balance the atmosphere of change, opportunities, and restlessness, the behavioral restrictions on women as a gender group grew even stronger. As a result, women had to take a posture of being resolutely content with the limited scope of action assigned to them, which did not reach far beyond the domestic realm (Rust 8-9). Rust argues that, by locating Charlotte's tragic flaw in her inability to act on her desires, the narrator is urging her female reader to know and pursue her desire to survive in the society which barely provides her with any room for individual growth. Thus, Rust envisions the narrator as a teacher to a select group of reader-students, with the heroine as a teaching material, and deduces the novel's primary message by deciphering the lessons that the narrator-teacher integrates into the heroine's story.

Stern's and Rust's studies suggest the well-grounded assumption that understanding the narrator's role is the key to accessing the social commentary embedded in *Charlotte Temple*. At the same time, the difference between the ways the two scholars interpret the terms of the narrator's engagement with the heroine, the text, and the reader tells us that there is more than one way to understand the narrator's role in *Charlotte Temple*, which explains the ongoing scholarly attention to the novel and its famous narrator figure.²

² Even though Stern's and Rust's studies focus on the narrator's message to the female reader through the heroine, the significance of *Charlotte Temple* has been analyzed in many different frames by literary scholars and historians. For example, Leonard Tennenhouse argues that Charlotte, who simultaneously bears the mark of sexual transgression and still succeeds to reinstate her daughter into the legitimate guardianship of her father, is a figure that fulfills the expectations of the post-Revolutionary American readership to retain its English lineage on the cultural terms after the political separation from Britain. Desiree Henderson finds a parallel between the mother-daughter relationship between Charlotte and her daughter Lucy Temple and the connection between *Charlotte Temple* and its sequel *Lucy Temple*,

This critical tradition of focusing on the narrator to decipher the social commentary in *Charlotte Temple* is useful for my study as well. It is also through examining the narrator that we can recognize how Rowson challenges the rhetoric of promise invoked by the discourse of female self-discipline. However, instead of focusing on the narrator's relationship to the heroine alone, for my purpose it is more revealing to examine how the narrator creates two subplots within the main, chronological narrative, one centered on the heroine and the other on the other characters who hold influence on the heroine and her seducer Montraville. The narrator, with her textual free rein, distinguishes certain moments from the main chronological narrative, either by zooming in on the heroine's psychological experiences or by making a digression where she provides background information about a character who plays only a secondary role to the heroine or the seducer. In three memorable moments, the narrator takes a close look at the heroine at the moment when she is astonished at another person's denigration of her morality, which is far from her self-identity. These three moments constitute one of the two subplots in this novel, which deals with Charlotte's realization that her virtue is determined entirely by other people's opinions and not by either her innate qualities or her self-assessment. In these moments, the reader is led to adopt the heroine's perspective and feel her sense of

arguing that Charlotte's connection to her daughter contains Rowson's criticism of the concepts of legitimacy and inheritance that upheld the social structure in the early Republic.

Larzer Ziff maintains that *Charlotte Temple's* plot that punishes Charlotte for her sexual transgression with death, which does not represent the social reality of the period where many women who had a premarital intercourse entered marriage, embodies the desire during the early national period to construct a figure whose worth was exactly represented by the reality of her chastity, when the changing society appeared to recognize people not for their real worth but by the images they represented themselves to be. Meanwhile, Eva Cherniavsky argues that Charlotte represents the status of women in post-Revolutionary America as "the unrepresentable," covered by the identities of men in the new nation's political, economic and social structure. While this subjection of women's identity was hidden behind the socially imposed domestic roles for women, Cherniavsky points out that Charlotte loses the domestic protection after her elopement, and her subsequent reactions to the harsh reality as a result demonstrate the real status of women in post-Revolutionary America, which can be registered only in affective terms due to the lack of any other identity marker available for a woman outside home.

helplessness as a woman who cannot alter other people's judgments of her virtue even when she does not agree with it. The other moments that interest me are those in which the narrator suddenly digresses from the main narrative and provides a portrait of a character who plays only a supportive role in the main narrative. Such summary-like character portraits are attached, in fact, to all the characters around Charlotte and Montraville and are strewn all over the narrative, so that those moments together form the second subplot in *Charlotte Temple*, which I call the narrator's "character exhibition."

These two subplots in turn challenge the two promises presented in eighteenth-century conduct literature about the self-disciplining woman, that is, that she will be eventually acknowledged as a morally independent individual and also gain supportive mentors and friends. The moments in *Charlotte Temple* that depict the heroine's helplessness in the face of other people's moral judgment lead the reader to doubt whether any living woman can ever be acknowledged as the true judge of her own morality, even though the ideal virtuous woman is depicted as capable of such in written materials from the post-Revolutionary period. Meanwhile, the characters that the narrator takes time to elaborate are all those who could be potential mentors and friends to either Charlotte or Montraville. Thus, through all the affixed portraits of the supporting characters, the narrator is providing the profile of potential candidates for helpful mentors and friends who could guide a young woman and man during the crucial years from the end of adolescence to marriage. The studiousness of each character portrait suggests that these moments of digression are meant to lead the reader to carefully consider for themselves whether it is feasible for a young person to meet a helpful mentor or friend in real life who could keep her on the path of self-regulation. In this chapter, I examine how the narrator creates the two subplots in *Charlotte Temple* and the way these subplots challenge the two promises of moral autonomy and friendly support, in order to understand how *Charlotte Temple* simultaneously studies and questions the discourse of female self-discipline.

For the most part in her narrative, the narrator uses Charlotte as a negative model in her lecture on female self-discipline. Following Charlotte through each step in the process of seduction, the narrator frequently adds her comment to point out in which way Charlotte breaches the tenets of female propriety with not so much sympathy as the strictness of a moral lecturer. For example, during the voyage to America, Montraville already shows signs that he may change his promise to marry Charlotte, and, worse still, his irresponsible friend Belcour sets his eyes on Charlotte and decides he would make her his own mistress when Montraville abandons her. The narrator follows this unfortunate turn of events for Charlotte not with a sentiment of sympathy but as an occasion to deliver another lesson for the woman reader on why Charlotte already has caused irrevocable damage to her life as a respectable woman. She writes:

Let not the reader imagine Belcour's designs were honourable. Alas! when once a woman has forgot the respect due to herself, by yielding to the solicitations of illicit love, they allowes all their consequence, even in the eyes of the man whose art has betrayed them, and for whose sake they have sacrificed every valuable consideration. (62-63)

Throughout the narrative, the narrator presents Charlotte in various stages of confusion and dilemma as an example that women should try to differ themselves from to succeed in their own self-control.

For this reason, the three times in the narrative when the narrator leads the reader to experience Charlotte's bewilderment from the heroine's own shaken perspective, instead of from the narrator's self-confident and judgmental one, stand out as significant. In the three passages in question, the narrator provides a close-up view of the moment when the heroine is utterly astonished when she is accused of moral laxity. These incidents are remarkable because the narrator uncharacteristically holds back from adding any commentary to point out Charlotte's error or warn the reader never to emulate her, as she usually does eagerly. Instead,

the narrator makes an effort to elaborate the situation so that the reader can experience Charlotte's confusion and helplessness vividly, as if they were the reader's own. These three moments when the narrator encourages the reader's identification with the heroine's confusion form one of the two subplots in *Charlotte Temple*; it traces the heroine's initiation to her social status as an object of other people's moral assessment. This subplot is where the novel challenges the viability of the promise of moral autonomy for the self-regulating woman.

The first of these three moments occurs when Charlotte first lands in America and overhears Mrs. Beauchamp whisper the word "pity" in her direction. This incident brings home to Charlotte the abject status of a mistress she now occupies, and causes her to lament:

And am I indeed fallen so low [...] as to be only pitied? [...] I know not which is most painful to endure, the sneer of contempt, or the glance of compassion, which is depicted in the various countenances of my own sex: they are both equally humiliating [...] low as your Charlotte has fallen, she cannot associate with infamy. (67)

Noteworthy about this passage is that the narrator directly quotes Charlotte's soliloquy without attaching her own commentary afterwards. Such reservation on the narrator's part has the opposite effect of those moments when the narrator presents Charlotte's action with a negative comment. When the narrator pairs Charlotte's action with the narrator's own didactic comment, it is to the effect of warning the reader to detach herself from Charlotte and let that avoidance be the guideline for the reader's own self-discipline. In this moment, however, by presenting Charlotte's soliloquy without any additional comment, the narrator leads the reader to momentarily identify with Charlotte, experience her astonishment and even the sense of victimization she feels when she thinks she has finally begun to be treated as an immoral woman as her mistress status would entail.

In two more occasions the narrator leads the reader to identify with the heroine, and both occasions stage the moment when the heroine is flabbergasted by other people's

accusation of her moral degeneracy, which she feels are unfair. The second moment is when Belcour, having an intention to make Charlotte his mistress, slips into Charlotte's bed while she is taking a fatigue-induced nap so that they could be found when Montraville enters Charlotte's room. Belcour has already planted seeds of doubt in Montraville by falsely reporting that Charlotte had made advances to many other men, including Belcour himself. Seeing Belcour and Charlotte in the same bed, Montraville instantly believes Belcour's previous report of her infidelity and cries out his enragement, which awakens her. Charlotte is utterly confused to find Montraville and Belcour in her chamber, but Montraville continues to scold her, calling her "Treacherous, infamous girl" and announces that their connection is over. Falsely accused of having been with "Belcour, or any other of [...] favoured lovers," Charlotte falls to her knees and tries to defend her innocence.

This moment is similar to the first one in that it stages Charlotte's lament against the unjustness of the accusation of her moral laxity. "Oh Montraville," Charlotte cries, "kill me, for pity's sake kill me, but do not doubt my fidelity Do not leave me in this horrid situation" (89). Charlotte's major rebuke against Belcour, who remains to feign his friendship to her after Montraville storms out, is also for his having caused Montraville to doubt her "fidelity" (92). The narrator, as in the previously discussed moment, focuses her efforts on following the scene closely without adding her own commentary. As a result, the reader is led to fully experience with Charlotte the unjustness of the accusation against her and her inability to revert the verdict made against her.

The third and harshest moment when Charlotte is dumbstruck at a stranger's denigration of her morality occurs when, on one particularly cold winter night, the landlady of Charlotte's cottage barges in and demands payment for the unpaid rent. Pregnant, ill, and out of money, Charlotte pleads for the landlady's "charity," only to hear the harshest reproach of her morality that Charlotte has had to endure:

“Charity,” cried the woman impatiently interrupting her, “charity indeed: why Mistress, charity begins at home, and I have seven children at home, honest, lawful children, and it is my duty to keep them; and do you think I will give away my property to a nasty, impudent hussey, to maintain her and her bastard; an I was saying to my husband the other day what will this world come to; honest women are nothing now-a-days, while the harlotings are set up for fine ladies, and look upon us no more nor the dirt they walk upon; but let me tell you, my fine spoken Ma’am, I must have my money; so seeing as how you can’t pay it, why you must trop, and leave all your fine gimcracks and fal der ralls behind you. I don’t ask for no more nor my right, and nobody shall dare for to go for to hinder me of it.” (113)

In this moment, the narrator again works as a reporter rather than a commentator and focuses on recreating the landlady’s harangue and Charlotte’s dumbfounded reaction. By this means the scene becomes the site where the reader can gain the most chilling experience of being judged as morally contemptible and bearing the physical threat that such moral verdict entails for a woman.³

All three moments feature Charlotte’s astonishment at other people’s accusations of her tarnished morality, and every time Charlotte is shocked mainly because those accusations are far from her own self-image as a generally obedient young woman who has made a mistake. Thus in the first two scenes Charlotte’s reaction to others’ disapproval of her moral status is denial and a struggle to persuade her accusers to acknowledge her still untarnished virtue. When Charlotte thinks Mrs. Beauchamp has called her a pitiable disgraced woman, Charlotte’s soliloquy begins with her lament “am I indeed fallen so low?” and ends with denial—“low as your

³ The narrator does add a comment before the landlady’s harangue, but it is about the narrator’s sad observation about the dearth of benevolence in the world, which rather encourages the reader’s identification with the forlorn situation of Charlotte rather than reminding the reader of Charlotte’s transgression and warning the reader against her (112-3).

Charlotte has fallen, she cannot associate with infamy" (67). In the second moment when Charlotte faces Montraville's misinformed accusation of her infidelity, she responds with the same sentiment of victimization and eagerness to clear her name of the unjust accusation. Whatever Montraville says, at this moment Charlotte still identifies herself with "fidelity" to Montraville. Thus, in the first two instances the main source of Charlotte's astonishment is the disparity between her own assessment of her morality and other people's evaluations of it, which are far lower than her own.

Noteworthy is the fact that the narrator presents these two moments without her own comment, as I have mentioned earlier. The effect is that the reader is not provided with any answer as to whether Charlotte's belief in her still essentially intact innate virtue is supposed to be criticized as a sign of her underestimation of the consequences of elopement or to be credited as an honest and thus legitimate self-assessment. If the narrator followed each moment with a comment such as "Alas, little did Charlotte know that, even when she feels she is still the obedient daughter of her parents at heart, one false step is enough to invite all the most harsh judgments of the world and she cannot deny them," then these two moments would become the sites where the narrator engages in her usual didactic method of presenting Charlotte as a negative model and encouraging the reader to learn by detaching herself from Charlotte. However, as we have seen, in the passages I have identified, the narrator does not add an immediate comment; as a result, the reader experiences with Charlotte the sense of helplessness at her inability to alter other people's judgment of her morality even when she does not agree with it.

Why does the narrator choose Charlotte's helplessness in the face of moral accusation as the moment to let the reader identify with the heroine? If the main purpose of her storytelling is to teach the reader a lesson in self-discipline, as the narrator claims several times in the text, then would it not be more effective to choose the moment of the heroine's remorse at her elopement to invoke the reader's identification? These three moments of the heroine's

bewilderment are better understood when we examine how they plant a doubt in the reader about one of the promises conduct writers present for the self-disciplining woman, that is, an acknowledgment of her as a morally independent individual in her society. As we have seen in chapter 1, female readers in post-Revolutionary America constantly encountered in books, pamphlets and magazine articles the idealized figure of the virtuous woman who had gained through diligent self-discipline the ability to not only keep herself virtuous but raise the morality of the people around her. If the conduct writers' praise of the virtuous woman's moral influence had truth in it, a young woman in the early Republic could anticipate her practice of self-control to transform her into an arbiter of virtue, a "teacher" whom people would listen to on issues of morality.

The three moments of Charlotte's bewilderment in *Charlotte Temple* plant a doubt about this prospect of a woman's access to moral autonomy and respectability through self-discipline. They remind the reader of how little power a woman has to vouch for her own morality in the face of other people's judgment of it. Theoretically, Charlotte has ruined her social respectability by eloping to a foreign country. However, the implied background of Charlotte up to the point she meets Montraville is that of a model docile young woman with a firm base in the pedagogy of self-discipline. When a girl like Charlotte, with her docile personality, virtuous parentage, and primary education in social mores, can fall, then how many a young woman has a good chance to avoid any similar mishap until she is safely acknowledged as a virtuous woman with her moral authority? The effectiveness of these two moments lies in the very reservation of the narrator in her commentary. The narrator does not overtly negate the possibility that a woman can gain a moral sovereignty to endorse her own moral integrity by practicing self-discipline. Rather, by simply presenting how Charlotte cannot disprove other people's reproach of her morality, the narrator invokes a string of thoughts in the

reader about how much moral autonomy the reader is likely to procure for herself through practicing self-discipline.⁴

The narrator herself tacitly gives a negative answer to this question, which becomes most obvious in the third moment in this subplot of the heroine's astonishment, when Charlotte endures the most vicious and most eloquent condemnation of her morality from the landlady. What stands out the most in the landlady's harangue against Charlotte is how easily she describes Charlotte as morally the most abject person, especially in comparison to landlady herself. The landlady presents herself as a dutiful and proper member of a right-based free country in comparison to Charlotte as a deceptive, irresponsible and morally abject woman. In the landlady's logic, evicting Charlotte and welcoming a tenant who can pay the rent fulfills her "duty" to support her "honest, lawful children" at home and an action to defend her "right" to use her property to serve for her socially sanctioned duty of guarding her home and family. In contrast, the landlady portrays Charlotte as a transgressing woman bearing the mark of her unlawful way of being—"her bastard"—and, worse still, one of the deceitful "harlotings" of the current society who are "set up for fine ladies" and impudently "look upon us [honest women as the landlady herself] no more nor the dirt they walk upon." In other words, the landlady is vilifying Charlotte in the same way the narrator vilifies Mlle La Rue in the larger narrative, as the archetype of unlawfulness, deceitfulness and contempt of other honest women. The ease with which the landlady turns Charlotte into a woman like Mlle La Rue, and the fact that by this

⁴ Elizabeth Barnes and Michelle Burnham argue that the text of *Charlotte Temple* instigates the reader's sympathy to the heroine, which effect transforms the experience of reading *Charlotte Temple* into a practice of giving consent without feeling coerced (Barnes), or into that of recognizing virtue as a renewable quality as republican theorists conceptualized after the Revolution (Burnham). While Barnes and Burnham explain that the reader of *Charlotte Temple* gains a moral education and experiences an affectional bond by feeling sympathy to the heroine, I argue that the three moments where the reader is led to identify with Charlotte are more likely to lead the reader to question the viability of the model of the virtuous woman with her moral authority rather than assuring the reader of the stability of the discourse of female virtue that composed a large part of moral discourse in post-Revolutionary America. See Barnes, chapter 3, esp. 60-65; Burnham 79-86.

moment Charlotte's self-esteem is reduced to such a degree that she cannot answer any other way than "I acknowledge thy correction just" (113), are enough to make the reader recognize that, when it comes to the assessment of a woman's morality, other people's opinions about her deeds decide all and her self-identity means nothing. Women's virtue is not the correlative of her internal virtue, which the practice of self-discipline is supposed to help fortify, but something that other people can determine with their words, based on their interpretations of what partial facts they know about the woman.

In that sense, the three moments of the heroine's astonishment at other people's moral accusations constitute a subplot which provokes not only the heroine's but also the reader's realization that a woman's social status is a perpetual object of moral assessment in her society. This subplot functions to strip female self-discipline of its promise of moral autonomy. Charlotte's experiences make the reader see the primary role of self-discipline as what it is: the regimen that helps her prove her conformity to the social mores acknowledged by the other people in her society, because they are the true judges of her moral status.

The second major promise conduct writers made to the self-disciplining woman was the prospect of having supportive mentors and friends who would constantly monitor her progress in self-regulation with a sincere and supportive intention. Parental advice literature widely read in post-Revolutionary America assures that true friends who can provide such constructive moral support are the most essential requisite for a virtuous and meaningful life. Yet, this promise of supportive mentors and friends for a self-disciplining woman is also studied and challenged in *Charlotte Temple*. To recognize this commentary, we need to examine another subplot of *Charlotte Temple* that the narrator creates with her narrative control, which I call "a character exhibition."

Along with the moments of the heroine's astonishment, the subplot of character exhibition is also created by the narrator's aberration from the main narrative. Even though the main narrative relates the events around Charlotte and Montraville in a chronological order, the

narrator frequently stops the main narrative to add a paragraph or even a whole chapter during which she provides background information on other characters, even those who play only secondary roles in the main plot. Chapters 2 to 5 provide an example of the way the narrator suspends the main story to provide such character information. The narrator uses chapter 1 to describe the encounter between Charlotte and Montraville that starts the main seduction plot. However, after finishing chapter 1 with Montraville handing Charlotte his letter, the narrator spends the next four chapters going back fifteen years and introducing the heroine's family history, mainly the story about the way her father Mr. Henry Temple met her mother Lucy Eldridge, along with the family background of each of them. This section stands out for the way the narrator strives to introduce so many characters who are not directly related to the main story of Charlotte and Montraville that it appears to be the summary of a separate novel. The detailed nature of this four-chapter-long digression does not merely serve to introduce the virtuous nature of both of Charlotte's parents. Rather, this part functions as a sort of narrative storage space, where the narrator compiles profiles of diverse character types in mid- and late-eighteenth-century British society that she regards as important for the young reader to be well acquainted with.

The narrator provides such summary-like portrait of characters more directly involved in the main story as well, and also adds them as digressions from the main narrative. Each time she adds personality descriptions for a character, she signals a transition in a discernible manner from the narrative mode of relation of events to character exposition. For example, most of chapter 7 relates how Mlle La Rue persuades the reluctant Charlotte to open Montraville's letter despite the heroine's compunction. In this part, the narrator mainly displays the rhetoric of Mlle La Rue, which is the part of this character that is directly related to Charlotte's story at this moment. However, at the end of the chapter the narrator signals a digression by writing "Here let me stop to make one remark," and follows it with one paragraph where she transfers to a

mode of categorical statement and summarizes Mlle La Rue's personality, background and motivations as a definitive character profile:

Here let me stop to make one remark, and trust me my very heart aches while I write it; but certain I am, that when once a woman has stifled the sense of shame in her own bosom, when once she has lost sight of the basis on which reputation, honour, every thing that should be dear to the female heart, rests, she grows hardened in guilt, and will spare no pains to bring down innocence and beauty to the shocking level with herself: and this proceeds from that diabolical spirit of envy, which repines at seeing another in the full possession of that respect and esteem which she can no longer hope to enjoy. (30)

The difference of the quoted part from the rest of the chapter is that, in this passage, the narrator is turning Mlle La Rue from a character in a specific storyline to a character type who assumedly populates the contemporaneous society that the woman reader should navigate. The narrator provides such conclusive character portraits for most of the characters, including: Montraville; Belcour; Colonel Crayton, who Mlle La Rue later seduces into marrying her; Mrs. Beauchamp, Colonel Crayton's daughter who later becomes Charlotte's benefactor in America; and Julia Franklin, who Montraville marries after abandoning Charlotte. The same pattern of following a signal of digression with a succinct report of the personality and background of the given character applies every time. These statements stay steadfast as unalterable facts about the characters, unaffected by the changes in situations the main narrative delineates. These moments form the second subplot in *Charlotte Temple*, the subplot of character exhibition.

It is within this second subplot of character exhibition that *Charlotte Temple* tests and questions the promise of supportive mentors and friends for the self-disciplining woman. The narrator attaches information to all the characters who could potentially be mentors or friends to Charlotte or Montraville and could help them stay on the path of self-discipline. By giving portraits of these characters around Charlotte and Montraville, this subplot is in fact striving to

answer the potential question a contemporaneous reader well-versed in conduct literature was likely to ask: why didn't the two main characters find any help from a mentor or a friend, like those who populate conduct books and seduction novels? When we review all the character portraits we come to realize these character profiles together embody the novel's criticism of the promise of supportive friendship in the discourse of female self-discipline. That is, in this subplot, the narrator imagines for the reader likely mentors and friends who can prevent a young woman's seduction, only to show that it is not likely for the reader to meet any such person in real life.

The most obvious cases of negative mentor and friend figures in the novel are Montraville's friend Belcour and Charlotte's teacher Mlle La Rue. Both Belcour and Mlle La Rue are endowed with succinct and clear character profiles that officially inaugurate them as unadulterated and conventional villains. Even aside from the descriptions I have reviewed, the narrator frequently uses finite and axiom-like language to proclaim their unambiguously evil status. Regarding Belcour, the narrator writes: "Self, darling self, was the idol he worshipped, and to that he would have sacrificed the interest and happiness of all mankind" (36); "A Man May Smile, and Smile, and Be a Villain" (87). As for Mlle La Rue, the narrator writes just as decisively that: "vice in general blinds its votaries, and they discover their real characters to the world when they are most studious to preserve appearances" (122); "vice, however prosperous in the beginning, in the end leads only to misery and shame" (132). These descriptions attached to the two most undisguised villains—from the reader's perspective—demonstrate that even the people who spend the most time with a young man and woman as a friend and the teacher can be the very source of the person's failure in self-discipline. Such a narrative argument contradicts the rhetoric of conduct literature that a young person can rely on mentors and friends to assist in the practice of self-regulation. How would a person distinguish villains from true mentors and friends, especially if all the villains are as persuasive and shrewd as Belcour and Mlle La Rue?

However, the more interesting character portraits in terms of their implications for the rhetoric of helpful mentors and friends are those of the virtuous, well-disciplined, and most importantly, well-intentioned characters around Charlotte. The portraits of Mrs. Temple as a potential parental mentor and Mrs. Beauchamp as a sincere female friend are particularly relevant to this point. Despite the two women's willingness to protect Charlotte, the portraits of Mrs. Temple and Mrs. Beauchamp in effect suggest not simply the difficulty but the incomprehensibility of the notion of a virtuous female adult helping another woman's self-control. This is due to the fact, the character portraits of Mrs. Temple and Mrs. Beauchamp show rather than tell, that the virtuous woman as defined in eighteenth-century conduct literature requires the transgression and sufferings of another woman in her vicinity to prove her virtue. When we examine the character profiles of these proper adults around the heroine, we can notice how Rowson uses this subplot of character exhibition to thoroughly demonstrate that it is a myth that a young woman can be a member of a supportive community of mentors and friends just because she decides to practice self-discipline and study conduct books for women.

The character portraits of Mrs. Temple and Mrs. Beauchamp amount to textual effigies of the proverbial virtuous woman. If Mrs. Temple's posture was to be described by one expression, it would be "forbearance in the midst of predicaments." She is first introduced as Lucy Eldridge, a young woman who shows a significant amount of fortitude when her family is destroyed by a wealthy man's whim, resulting in her mother's and brother's deaths and her father's imprisonment. Forbearance is also her primary response when she, now as Mrs. Temple, hears the news of her daughter's elopement:

"Since," said she, "the severest scrutiny cannot charge me with any breach of duty to have deserved this severe chastisement, I will bow before the power who inflicts it with humble resignation to his will; [...] I will wear a smile on my face, though the thorn rankles in my heart; and if by so doing, I in the smallest degree contribute to restore [my father's and husband's] peace of mind, I shall

be amply rewarded for the pain the concealment of my own feelings may occasion.” (59)

If we alter the pronoun “I” to “she,” this soliloquy can easily transform into behavioral instructions for women on the occasion of family tragedy in conduct books. By stressing Mrs. Temple’s clean conscience and her determination to overcome her sorrow to support her father and husband, the narrator establishes Mrs. Temple as the model virtuous woman who guards her family and home in all occasions.

While the narrator portrays Mrs. Temple as an incarnation of forbearance, Mrs. Beauchamp is transformed into an emblem of benevolence against the backdrop of Charlotte’s first bout of depression. As she becomes certain that Montraville has lost his affection for and his will to marry her, Charlotte falls into depression and physical emaciation. Living in the same neighborhood with Charlotte, Mrs. Beauchamp soon notices Charlotte’s pain and feels inclined to extend her friendship, but hesitates for fear of people’s contempt for those who associate with a disgraced woman such as Charlotte. However, when she overhears during a walk with her husband Charlotte’s plaintive song about welcoming death that would end her suffering, Mrs. Beauchamp finally decides to visit and console Charlotte. After listening to his wife’s decision, Major Beauchamp praises her with the words reminiscent of the conduct book definitions of female benevolence and friendship: “how dost thou rise every moment in my esteem. Follow the impulse of thy generous heart, my Emily. Let prudes and fools censure if they dare, and blame a sensibility they never felt; I will exultingly tell them that the heart that is truly virtuous is ever inclined to pity and forgive the errors of its fellow-creatures” (79). When we review these portraits of Mrs. Temple and Mrs. Beauchamp, it becomes clear that the narrator has created the two women by adding fictional flesh and blood to the model virtuous woman delineated in the period’s conduct literature.

To show that these two virtuous women cannot save Charlotte from her grief and death would have been a sufficiently cogent narrative argument that a virtuous adult cannot

necessarily function as an effective mentor or friend to a young woman in moral peril. However, a closer look at the textual portraits of Mrs. Temple and Mrs. Beauchamp reveals the novel's message that the ideal virtuous woman as described in eighteenth-century conduct literature is, by definition, not suitable for the task of assisting another woman's self-discipline. Female virtue in eighteenth century conduct literature is conceptualized in contrast to female degeneracy. The qualities that constitute female virtue in conduct literature such as wisdom, forbearance, charity, and the ability to classify people into morally positive and negative categories, are hard to be manifested when there is no negative character around for a woman to read, judge, bear with, and help. *Charlotte Temple* renders this unspoken requisite for female virtue extremely visible in the figure of Charlotte. As a disgraced woman, Charlotte ironically functions to sort the women she encounters to either side of morality; the women who ostracize her in turn appear to lack benevolence, while others gain an opportunity to prove their virtue by dealing gracefully with the consequences of Charlotte's elopement.

Mrs. Temple and Mrs. Beauchamp fall in the latter category of the people whose virtue is proved in the aftermath of Charlotte's seduction. Mrs. Temple's decision to keep calm adds respectability to her because Charlotte's elopement is interpreted as such a familial calamity that it can test any normal person's equanimity. Meanwhile, Mrs. Beauchamp's initial dilemma and her eventual decision regarding extending friendship to Charlotte can invoke admiration from the reader particularly when the reader understands how much disgrace a woman like Charlotte, a young mistress of an absent man, can inflict on those who associate with her. In this sense, the portraits of Mrs. Temple and Mrs. Beauchamp evince the irony that it is the fallen woman who can promote other women into the coveted status of "the virtuous woman." However, this effect of "moral uplifting" is not reciprocated. Mrs. Temple and Mrs. Beauchamp are inaugurated as virtuous women in the aftermath of Charlotte's fall, but neither woman's virtue can be used to lighten Charlotte's moral sin enough to keep her from bearing the

culturally expected consequences of elopement, that is, social isolation, poverty, physical and emotional pain, and death.

Thus, among all the character portraits the narrator installs in the narrative, the portraits of Mrs. Temple and Mrs. Beauchamp carry the most direct commentary about the discourse of female self-discipline. By portraying Mrs. Temple and Mrs. Beauchamp as the virtuous women in conduct literature, and by doing so against the backdrop of Charlotte's misconduct and resultant predicaments, the narrator is making a statement about the futility of a young woman searching for a supportive mentor and friend in the model virtuous woman.

The second subplot of character exhibition thus harbors the message that the attempt of a young woman to find a mentor and a friend in real life to help her self-control is likely to be fruitless. In her delineations of Belcour and Mlle La Rue, the narrator reminds the reader of the possibility that any number of people in the position of the best friend or the favoring teacher can prove to be villains. In the portraits of Mrs. Temple and Mrs. Beauchamp, the narrator tacitly argues that it is particularly unlikely that a young woman can have the ideal virtuous woman as her friend or mentor as so many young women do in conduct writings and novels, because the virtuous woman can exist only when the young woman around her shows a lack of self-discipline.

In this chapter, I have traced the two subplots the controlling narrator of *Charlotte Temple* creates through close-ups upon the heroine's psychological experiences and free digressions where she builds in character portraits. Examining how these two subplots stage the novel's criticism of the rhetoric of rewards within the discourse of female self-discipline, this chapter follows the scholarly tradition of focusing on the narrator for clues about the social commentary in *Charlotte Temple*. However, the work in this chapter focuses not only on which message the narrator delivers to the reader regarding the mainstream cultural discourse, but also on how the narrator structurally functions in the text to enable the delivery of such a message. Even though it is easy to identify the narrator's voice with that of the author's, the

narrator in *Charlotte Temple* is also a textual device that Rowson uses to structure the text in a way suitable to test the viability of the two promises presented in the mainstream discourse. It is by creating a narrator who unabashedly digresses, inserts or withholds comments that Rowson constructs a text that follows a linear plot of seduction but also accommodates two subplots, each of which tests a different promise suggested by conduct writers for the self-disciplining woman. In that regard, by examining the narrator's textual function, this chapter elucidates both the novel's commentary on the discourse of female self-discipline and the author's adeptness in using the narrative assets to such a degree that she engineers her text to accommodate a significant and critical cultural commentary on the popular discourse of female conduct.

Rowson displays the unavailability of each of the two promises of female self-discipline in *Charlotte Temple*. In the following chapter, I review Hannah Foster's *The Coquette* to find out how Foster highlights the conflict between the two models of self-disciplining woman, the morally autonomous woman who consults her inner moral monitor, and the obliging member of friendship who unconditionally follows her friends' moral advice. While adopting a well-known seduction scandal of the historic woman Elizabeth Whitman, Foster presents much of her story through the letters between the heroine Eliza Wharton and her friends, and that way places much attention on the interactions among this group of female friends. What these letters display is not a simplistic configuration of a coquette and her acquaintances trying to edify their aberrant friend. Rather, the letters of the heroine and her female friends, which contain both their differing opinions on proper behaviors of Eliza as a single woman and the signs of their mutual respect, together deliver a story of a group of well-educated women bogged down in an argument with no immediate solution. The same reason causes Eliza to continue her harmful relationship with the rake Major Sanford, and leads to her friends to let her do so: both the heroine and her friends vacillate between the cultural ideal of the morally autonomous woman and that of the obliging friend, thus failing to make any decisive action for a long time. Using the letter form to convert the seduction plot into a story of a group of young women friends, Foster

makes her female characters mirror the confusion the contemporaneous woman reader may have felt between the two potentially contradictory models of virtuous woman in conduct literature.

CHAPTER 4
THE COQUETTE

In this chapter, I discuss Hannah Foster's *The Coquette*, focusing on the way the author uses the epistolary format to stage her commentary on the discourse of female self-discipline. In *Charlotte Temple*, Susanna Rowson uses the narrator figure to build two subplots in which the heroine and the other characters receive an equal amount of attention. In *The Coquette*, Foster uses the epistolary form to juxtapose the heroine's voice and the voices of the other characters, particularly her female friends, so that the two groups of letters enhance each other's visibility. Using the letter form, Foster converts the heroine-centered seduction plot into an argument among female friends on a moral issue, namely, the boundary of proper behavior for a white, middle-class single woman in late eighteenth-century America. Once captured through their letters in the state of an argument, the female characters in the novel reflect the image of educated women in the post-Revolutionary period struggling to achieve a balance between the two different messages within the discourse of female self-discipline. In this way, Foster modifies her text to accommodate her observations about both the strength and the weakness of the discourse of women's self-control, which had a considerable and palpable impact on the daily lives of women in post-Revolutionary America.

To find the author's message about the discourse of female self-discipline, many critics have focused on the way *The Coquette* portrays the heroine, Eliza Wharton. It is well known that Eliza Wharton is modeled after a historic figure, Elizabeth Whitman, a daughter of a revered minister, and represents a life of social scenes in late eighteenth-century Connecticut. When Elizabeth Whitman was found dead after giving birth to an illegitimate child in a remote tavern in Danvers, Massachusetts, the story was an instant scandal that writers and ministers of the

period did not waste time in turning into material for their moral lectures on the importance of woman's self-control. In newspaper accounts and sermons of the day, Elizabeth Whitman was portrayed as a woman who met a tragic death after falling a victim to seduction because of her erroneous notions of romance imbibed from the habit of novel reading, and the tendency to "coquetry" with which she turned down proposals from respectable suitors waiting for a still better proposal (Davidson *Revolution* 223). In other words, Foster modeled her heroine after a woman whose story was used and recycled by conservative writers of the period as one of tragic consequences for a woman who failed at self-discipline.

Many studies have justly elucidated how Foster treats her heroine differently from the way other, conservative writers in post-Revolutionary America treated Elizabeth Whitman. The biggest difference *The Coquette* shows from newspaper articles and sermons of the period lies in the way Foster gives more voice to her heroine by using the epistolary form. *The Coquette* is composed entirely of letters, two-thirds of them exchanged among Eliza and her female confidants, the rest exchanged between Eliza's two suitors and their respective friends. Scholars have focused particularly on Eliza's letters to find Foster's message. This focus does the novel justice, because Eliza's letters stand out for the way this well-educated and friendly woman freely converses with her friends, reporting on the events around her, people she meets, her views on general social customs, and most of all, her views on the socially accepted behavioral paradigm for a single woman. As in Elizabeth Whitman's case, Eliza also has many suitors in the life she dedicates to circulating in social scenes and visiting her friends in different towns; as Miss Whitman did, though for different reasons, Eliza also remains single for a long time until she bears an illegitimate child of an irresponsible man and meets a lonely death after giving birth to the stillborn child. However, unlike Elizabeth Whitman, Eliza is given her letters in *The Coquette* to eloquently and energetically explain her reasons for postponing a married life. In her letters, Eliza explains her reservations about the various restrictions put on a life of a married woman in her society and argues that her "heart" and "natural disposition" should weigh

equally in her decisions regarding marriage, as much as the social decorum or expectations of her time.

Focusing on the heroine's letters, scholars have explained Foster's efforts to construct the heroine as a woman who experiments with how much freedom she can gain through negotiating with the behavioral paradigm for a single woman in her society. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg interprets Eliza as striving to live a life in which pleasure is not antithetical to but compatible with virtue, thus challenging to the social paradigm in which virtue and propriety for a single woman is aligned with the happiness that comes from conforming to the social mores (172-3). According to Julia Stern, Eliza's letters display not only her attempt to carve her own way of life out of the behavioral rules of the era but her effort to secure her friends' support for her experimentation. Stern explains that Eliza attempts, through her letters, to attain "proto-liberal sympathy" from her friends, which is an attempt to understand another person even when his or her behaviors or life situations are different from what one is used to. However, Eliza's friends are only capable of extending a "republican sympathy," with which they cannot understand or condone Eliza's challenge of the behavioral rules that support their carefully maintained elite, homogenous and republican social circle (75). These studies show us how Foster uses the letter form to give more voice to her heroine and, by extension, to all the women who fell victims to seduction in their real lives as did Elizabeth Whitman.¹

¹ Other critics have also focused on the heroine's eccentric views toward desirable terms of engagement in social interactions, in search for the author's commentary upon the early nation's social structure. For example, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon finds the biggest source of Eliza's aberrance in her assumption of "open sociality," that is, her belief that an individual can gain an identity in her society through circulating in various social gatherings where people converse and interact based on their shared interest. Dillon argues that Eliza's sexual fall comes only after the moment when Eliza realizes that her society is ruled by "closed sociality," whereby an individual can gain a subjectivity only as a gendered being preparing to enter or having entered a heterosexual marriage; see Dillon, Chapter 3, esp. 184-96.

While Dillon interprets Eliza's attempt to prolong her singlehood as a result of her misunderstanding the dominant terms of relations in her society, Grantland Rice avers that Eliza understands social relations in terms of commercial exchange as many other people in post-Revolutionary America were beginning to

In this study, I turn the focus to examine not the heroine's but the author's experimentation with the discourse of women's self-control in *The Coquette*. To discuss this aspect, I suggest we turn our attention again to the letter form that builds the novel, but this time not only to the heroine's letters but to the way the heroine's and her friends' letters stand juxtaposed with one another, each of them containing its writer's uninterrupted opinions on a given issue. I argue that, by presenting the interactions between Eliza and her female friends through their letters, Foster stages a situation of moral disagreement among self-disciplining female friends. This situation is important for our study, because it unveils a rhetorical flaw in the discourse of female self-discipline.

As I explained in Chapter 1, conduct writings on women's self-control in the post-Revolutionary period present two rewards for the woman who successfully internalizes the tenets of female self-discipline. One of them is her acknowledgment as a person with a firm internal moral monitor, which renders her an independent arbiter of her own and other people's virtue. The other is membership in a supportive community of mentors and friends who could help her practice of self-regulation through sincere advice. These two models of the self-disciplining woman, one as a morally independent individual and the other as a member of supportive friendships, were both repeatedly invoked as the ultimate state that a young woman who diligently practices the regimen of self-review and self-control would reach one day.

However, these two models of self-disciplining woman in effect impose two different moral authorities for a woman to follow, thus creating a potential conflict. On the one hand, conduct writers in the early national period delineate the model self-disciplining woman as a woman who has developed a firm inner moral monitor through years of habitual self-discipline and who maintains her virtue by consulting her internalized monitor, unaffected by any external

do. Rice argues that Eliza's persistent refusal to make any commitment, or her "coquetry," is a calculated effort to sustain her value in her society where people gauge one another's value not in terms of each person's intrinsic virtue but according to how successfully he or she maintains him- or herself interesting and attractive through interactions with others; see Rice, Chapter 7, esp. 162-8.

influence. To follow this model, a woman should develop and practice consulting her own inner moral standards, so that she will not be deterred from her path of morality under any circumstances. On the other hand, parental advice tracts popular in the post-Revolutionary period presented an opposing model of the self-disciplining woman who follows her true mentor's and friends' advice and thereby corrects her thoughts and behaviors if advised to, even when she feels reluctant to make the changes. In this way, the writings on female self-discipline from late eighteenth-century America present two contradictory models that advise the woman reader to follow two opposite moral authorities: her inner monitor, and her friends and mentors as one esteemed group of external monitors. These two models of self-disciplining woman could have confused a woman reader in the post-Revolutionary period well-versed in the teachings of woman's self-control. The possibility of moral disagreement among virtuous women is important because it has a potential to reveal this usually hidden conflict between the two models of respected self-controlling woman, thus unveiling the rhetorical flaw within the discourse of woman's self-control in the post-Revolutionary period.

Foster uses the letter form to convert the interactions between Eliza and her female friends into this problematic situation of moral disagreement among self-disciplining women. Two characteristics of the letter form contribute to this effect. First, the letter form compartmentalizes Eliza's and each of her friends' letters, so that each letter writer will be given her letters as a space where she can express her opinions as elaborately as she wants and without interruption. As a result, the novel maximizes the visibility of the difference between Eliza' and her friends' views on the issue of the appropriate behavior of a virtuous single woman, because each of them makes the most of her letters to expatiate on her view on the issue. Secondly, the letter form maintains the frame of respectful friendship that encompasses all the female correspondents. However different some of their opinions might appear, Eliza and her female friends regard one another as respectable friends who have been collaborating over years in the practice of self-discipline. Even in letters in which they express, criticize and defend

their different views on the proper behavior for a single woman, Eliza and her friends also include expressions of their care and respect for one another. Because of these two attributes of the letter form, the interactions between Eliza and her female friends in *The Coquette* do not remain simply as differing opinions. Instead, they constitute a situation in which a group of female friends who regard one another as self-regulating women find themselves in disagreement on a moral issue. The detailed display of such a moral dispute among these female friends in *The Coquette* unveils the rhetorical flaw within the discourse of female self-discipline.

In the following analysis, I further this discussion by, first, examining the conflicting demands of the two models of self-disciplining woman as they were promoted in the writings on women's virtue in post-Revolutionary America, and how the situation of moral disagreement among self-regulating women reveals this conflict. Second, I review how Foster uses the letter form to present Eliza and her friends as self-disciplining women in disagreement, each of them trying and failing to find balance between the two different ideals of virtuous woman. Through this process I aim to shed light on the way Foster uses her command of the epistolary form to embed in her novel a critique of the rhetorical instability of the mainstream cultural discourse that affected so many contemporaneous women's daily lives.

The conflict between the two models of self-disciplining woman in post-Revolutionary America is not readily visible because each model is explained in writings well-circulated in the period by authors confident about the legitimacy of the model they present. However, in effect the two models of the self-disciplining woman as a morally autonomous individual and as a member in a supportive community of friends demand a studious young woman to follow two different moral authorities, her inner moral judgment and her friends' and mentors' advice. The model of the morally autonomous woman requires her to always develop and consult her own moral monitor prior to any external influence. However, when it comes to the people whom she

regards as her friends and mentors, she should unconditionally relinquish her own judgment to follow the advice of this exceptional group of external monitors.

How could a woman reconcile these two visions of self-disciplining woman? We do not know what solution an individual early woman reader found to this dilemma, but Karen Weyler locates a theoretical base in conduct writings that nullifies this dilemma as what can be called the theory of “social mirroring.” In parental advice literature, the moral scrutiny and critique from friends and mentors was not considered as infringing on a person’s moral autonomy, because the genre operates on the basic premise that external moral monitors are essentially functioning as “mirrors” of the person’s own internal monitor, pointing out the moral flaws that her internal monitor has failed to detect but would have also observed as flaws had it noticed them. Weyler quotes Adam Smith’s theory in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) as summing up the underlying assumption in parental advice literature that true friends’ moral judgments are essentially identical to what a person’s inner monitor would command. Smith maintains that the most objective self-examination occurs when a person reviews his or her own conduct from the perspective of the “impartial spectator” (110). According to Smith, a person can imagine the “impartial spectator’s” view only by experiencing other people’s reactions to his or her own behaviors. By living in a society and observing which of his behaviors is approved by others and which is disapproved, a person eventually comes to a state where he or she can determine which thoughts and actions are morally approved even when no other person is present. Thus in Smith’s theory, experiencing the reactions from external monitors in his society builds the foundation of a person’s internal moral monitor. A person develops his or her inner monitor, or “impartial spectator,” by studying other people who “mirror” his or her own thoughts and actions and throw back the images coated with moral qualifications.

Weyler finds a similarity between the unreserved injunction in parental advice tracts for a woman reader to follow her friends’ advice and Smith’s social theory that external monitors contribute to the formation of a person’s inner monitor. If a woman reader’s inner monitor is built

by internalizing other people's reactions in the first place, she does not have to interpret her true friends' comments on her shortcomings as interference with her moral autonomy, because those friends are only echoing what her inner monitor would have noted about the same flaws. A woman can thus be unreservedly open to her true friends' moral criticisms and change herself accordingly, because the friends' comments are of the same source as her own judgment and can only fortify her own moral strength.

The question is whether the reality of America at the end of the eighteenth century fit such a theoretical assumption that friendly moral criticism was only beneficial to a person's moral strength. Was there no occasion during which a person may disagree with her friends' criticism of her morality, because her interpretation of virtue was different from her friends' notions of it? In such occasions of a conscious disagreement among friends on certain moral issues, or even on their criticism of one another's moral flaws, wasn't the advice offered to a young woman in parental advice literature to unconditionally follow her friends' criticism despite her instinctive resistance equivalent to an instruction to suspend her moral autonomy? Can we assume that early women readers also accepted the theory that her friends' and mentors' moral standards were homogenous to her inner monitor and that way ignored the potential that her inner monitor could disagree with her external monitors?²

Writers of more conservative fictional stories in the period often circumvented this issue by portraying the relationship between mentor and mentee or that among female friends as being completely without moral disagreements. In *The Power of Sympathy*, the virtuous matron Mrs. Holmes writes to Myra Harrington, a young woman whom she has guided in self-regulation over years, that "You are such a good girl that I know not in what to direct you; for you leave me

² The issue of the conflict between the internal and the external moral monitors generated debates among eighteenth-century moral philosophers, and was considered a crucial issue in theorizing the process of self-discipline. Smith himself had to revise his explanation of the relation between the internal and the external monitors, or that between conscience and popular opinion, in the sixth edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in response to Sir Gilbert Elliot's question on the issue. See the editors Raphael's and Macfie's explanation of this revision process in Smith 16.

no room for advice—continue to anticipate the desires of my heart and to secure the high opinion you have obtained there” (57-58). When her close friend points out the error in her feelings for a married man, Emily Hamilton, the heroine of the eponymous novel, shows nothing but gratitude to her friends’ advice and tries to restrain her feelings without a complaint. Hannah Foster herself also creates such a model friendship with no disagreement in *The Boarding School*, her more conservative fiction that she published one year after *The Coquette*. Critics have pointed out how the Harmony Grove graduates in *The Boarding School*, whose correspondence is featured in the novel, make similar moral judgments and only comment on each other’s morality to offer praise.³ Even though such relationships could appear unrealistic and formulaic, it would be an easy solution to demonstrate a model supportive relationship among self-disciplining women. If there is no difference of opinions among female friends, an author does not have to address the issue of which moral standard he or she will recommend a female character to follow.

It is in this context that Foster’s epistolary display of sometimes playful, sometimes somber debates between Eliza and her female friends becomes worthy of attention. Unlike those authors who delineate female friendship as being based on the homogenous moral view, Foster demonstrates in *The Coquette* that there were numerous occasions when self-disciplining female friends disagreed on moral issues, which left each of those women torn between the imperative to follow her own moral judgment and that to listen to her friends’ advice. I stress that it is the letter form that enables Foster to manifest such a conflict between the two models of virtuous woman and the confusion it caused in living women in late eighteenth-century America. Conservative writers’ accounts of Elizabeth Whitman testify how a seduced woman’s whole life can be summarized as the story of an aberrant woman who did not heed the tenets of self-regulation. Foster differentiates *The Coquette* from such simplistic accounts by exploiting the letter form’s dual function of granting the heroine and her friends the

³ See Weyler 67; Pettengill 191-192.

same opportunity to express their different opinions, and keeping the frame of female friendship at the same time. It is by understanding these roles of the letter form that we can recognize the female correspondents in *The Coquette* as a group of young women with respectable backgrounds, thoroughly confused by the conflicting demands of the period's conduct literature for women.

Due to the epistolary form, both Eliza's and her friends' opinions on the issue of morally sanctioned action for a virtuous single woman can be displayed in their respective depth and richness, with the difference between the two clearly pronounced. If the novel was not in the form of letters but was recounted within the common lexicon of post-Revolutionary America, Eliza's actions during the period after her father's and fiancée's deaths until her own death, the period covered by the novel, could be simply summed up as a failure to follow the expected code of a single woman's appropriate way to manage social interactions. This orthodox judgment of Eliza's behavior is in fact voiced in the middle of the novel by Mr. Atkins, a friend of the more respectable of Eliza's two suitors, Reverend Boyer. By this point in the novel Eliza has met two suitors, Reverend Boyer, whom all Eliza's acquaintances approve of, and Major Peter Sanford, whose title, assumed wealth, and graceful manners make people want him in their society while his reputation as a rake makes them at the same time wary of his advances to any young woman in their charge. Both Boyer and Sanford declare their love for Eliza; Boyer pleads for Eliza's acceptance of his marriage proposal while Sanford pleads for Eliza's rejection of any suitor's proposal so that he will not lose her company as a single woman with a relative freedom to socialize. Eliza refuses to commit to either of the two men's pleas. She agrees to marry Boyer eventually, but only on the condition that he waits until she becomes absolutely certain it is time to enter a marriage. This way, Eliza attempts to keep the company of both Boyer, who keeps courting her tied to her promise, as well as other men including Sanford, who she keeps meeting in social scenes. Mr. Atkins reports to Boyer, who is increasingly growing anxious due to Eliza's postponement of their marriage, on the popular opinion of Eliza's behavior:

Eliza's conduct had, for some time past, been a subject of speculation in the town; that formerly, her character was highly esteemed; but [...] her intimacy with a man of Sanford's known libertinism; more especially as she was supposed to be engaged to another, had rendered her very censurable; [...] they [Eliza and Sanford] were often together; [...] they walked, talked, sung and danced together in all companies; [...] some supposed he would marry her; others, [...] he only meditated adding her name to the black catalogue of deluded wretches, whom he had already ruined!" (167-8)

This succinct report shows the two important codes that constitute appropriate social interaction for a white, middle-class single woman in late eighteenth-century America: discernment and commitment. A single woman of Eliza's class who cares for her reputation should be careful to associate with only honorable people when she navigates the morally unfiltered social scenes where decent men and rakes coexist in the same ballrooms and parlors. In addition, she eventually has to commit herself to a trustworthy suitor to preclude any more chance to become the target of a rake, who will only ruin her reputation without offering the title of a married woman. The quoted report of popular opinion points out that Eliza has failed the behavioral code of discernment by associating with Sanford, known to all as a rake, and also the code of commitment by associating with any man at all when she has, even conditionally, accepted Boyer's proposal. In this way, Eliza has failed the social codes for the proper deportment of a single woman and that fact alone is enough to taint Eliza's moral respectability in popular opinions of her character.

However, because of the epistolary form in which both Eliza and her friends are given a space in which to formulate their beliefs without interruption, the issue of Eliza's behavior (which Mr. Atkins summarizes in less than ten sentences) is extended into a novel-length argument in which the differences between Eliza's and her friends' opinions on a single woman's proper behavior becomes more pronounced by the juxtaposition of their letters. The letter form

provides Eliza with an opportunity to set up an alternate set of moral standards of her own that justify her actions that breach the conventional codes of discernment and commitment. As for discerning which man is appropriate for her to associate with, Eliza presents “fancy” and “imagination” as criteria that are equally important as the commonly accepted standard of “reason.” When Lucy Freeman volunteers to assist Eliza in evaluating the suitors’ characters by clearly labeling Sanford as a “rake” and Boyer as a “worthy man,” Eliza replies that her “reason and judgment entirely coincide” with Lucy’s judgment but her “fancy claims some share in the decision,” making her attracted to Sanford who is capable of creating various pleasures in his company (125).

As for the accepted code of “commitment,” Eliza also presents alternative criteria of “heart” and “natural disposition.” Foster dedicates the first three letters of the novel to Eliza’s explanation of her new found devotion to these alternative standards, which she values as much as social norms for female propriety. As often noted, as early as in the first letter of *The Coquette*, Eliza proclaims “pleasure” at being finally freed from the obligation of tending to her dying father and fiancé (107). In the second letter Eliza reports to Lucy how she is recollecting the fact that she is “[n]aturally cheerful, volatile, and unreflecting” and has a “natural propensity for mixing in the busy scenes and active pleasures of life” (108-9). In the same letter, she even attempts to rename her disposition, which Lucy used to call “coquettish,” as deserving “a softer appellation; as they proceed from an innocent heart, and are the effusions of a youthful and cheerful mind” (109).

Eliza’s commitment to alternative standards of heart and disposition in turn prevents her from following the second social code of “commitment.” Every time Eliza is urged by her friends and the two suitors to make an official commitment to one of the two men, Eliza refuses to do so in the name of protecting her “heart’s freedom” and enjoying undeterred participation in various social conversations and gatherings that appease her disposition for as long as she can. When Eliza’s cousin and friend, Mrs. Richman, who is apprehensive about Sanford’s interest in Eliza

and eager to see Eliza's marriage to Boyer, reports that all Eliza's friends "wish to see you [Eliza] suitably and agreeably connected," Eliza replies: "I am young, gay, volatile. A melancholy event has lately extricated me from those shackles, which parental authority had imposed on my mind. Let me then enjoy that freedom to gratify my natural disposition in participation of those pleasures which youth and innocence afford" (113). When Sanford, threatened by the prospect of Eliza marrying Boyer, demands that she promise not to accept Boyer's proposal, Eliza also rejects his demand by again referring to her heart's freedom: "I do not intend to form any immediate connection" (143).

Because the letter form grants Eliza an opportunity to present a long and eloquent vindication of her actions that could have been otherwise summarized quite simply and negatively, her friends' argument for the socially sanctioned codes of discernment and commitment becomes equally more frequent, longer, and more eloquent. Mrs. Richman warns Eliza of the danger of the illusions that one's imagination tends to forge without a ground: "But beware, Eliza!—Though strowed with flowers, when contemplated by your lively imagination, it is, after all, a slippery, thorny path. The round of fashionable dissipation is dangerous. A phantom is often pursued, which leads its deluded votary the real form of wretchedness" (113). When Eliza's infatuation with Sanford's grace and appearance of wealth grows, which Eliza herself condones with her acceptance of fancy as a legitimate standard for judgment, Lucy Freeman writes a letter with a stronger and more methodical denunciation of fancy and its tendency to beguile a woman. After echoing Mrs. Richman's warning, "Beware of the delusions of fancy," Lucy refutes Eliza's notion of Sanford's social grace and assumed wealth, bit by bit:

You seem to be particularly charmed with the fortune of Major Sanford; with the gaiety of his appearance; with the splendor of his equipage; with the politeness of his manners; with what you call the graces of his person! These, alas! are superficial, ensnaring endowments. As to fortune, prudence, economy, and regularity are necessary to preserve it, when possessed. Of these Major

Sanford is certainly destitute; [...] As to external parade, it will not satisfy the rational mind, when it aspires to those substantial pleasures for which yours is formed. And as to the graces of person and manners, they are but a wretched substitute for those virtues which adorn and dignify human life. (150)

By emphasizing the deceitfulness of fancy and imagination, Mrs. Richman and Lucy reassert the importance of a single woman being judicious in selecting men for her company, lest she should fall a dupe to the deceitful arts of a seducer.

Eliza's friends are equally adamant in disproving the legitimacy of heart and disposition as reliable standards for a single woman's behavioral propriety. Reproaching Eliza's reluctance to commit to a man in the name of giving freedom to her heart, Lucy encourages Eliza to "act with that modest freedom, that dignified unreserve which bespeaks conscious rectitude and sincerity of heart" (125). In Lucy's view, such moderated freedom would be compatible with and even thrive from the stability originating from Eliza's commitment to an honorable man. When Eliza becomes older, more dejected from Boyer's withdrawal of his proposal and her decreasing number of suitors, and, as a result, finds fleeting consolation in the company of the still deceitful and now married Sanford, Lucy more directly warns Eliza against seeking for what appeals to her disposition and urges her to respect the social code of commitment. Lucy writes: "Slight not the opinion of the world. We are dependent beings; and while the smallest traces of virtuous sensibility remain, we must feel the force of that dependence, in a greater or less degree. No female, whose mind is uncorrupted, can be indifferent to reputation. It is an inestimable jewel, the loss of which can never be repaired. While retained, it affords conscious peace to our own minds, and ensures the esteem and respect of all around us" (212). Here Lucy is directly questioning the soundness of the heart and disposition as moral standards. Lucy writes that if there are "the smallest traces of virtuous sensibility" remaining in Eliza's mind and if her mind is "uncorrupted," Eliza cannot ignore her social reputation, which is very much being damaged by the company of Sanford. If Eliza's cherished standards of heart and disposition are not sending

a warning signal to Eliza about the harmful impact of Sanford's company, then, Lucy asserts, Eliza's newly found moral standards are merely corrupting her mind.

When the female friends in *The Coquette* are talking with one another, they check themselves, often due to decorum, from expatiating on their different views in order not to launch into a full argument; the reader can witness this tendency in the direct conversations between Eliza and Mrs. Richman reported in Eliza's letters (120-1). However, in her letter, Eliza uses more words to explain the new moral standards that she has begun to cherish and consult, and appears to do so with less consciousness about her reader's reaction to her rather original system of value than she would be about the reactions of a listener in front of her. In response to Eliza's more elaborate and eloquent self-explanation, Eliza's friends, particularly Lucy, also use more words to point out the danger of consulting fancy and imagination and indulging her heart and disposition. As a result, observing these women's interactions through their letters, the reader can gain a clearer view of their differing opinions on the issue of the proper behavior of a virtuous single woman.

Yet, the letter form also maintains the frame of mutually supporting female friendship that encompasses these female correspondents, however pronounced their differences may occasionally become along the plot. The fact that Eliza and her friends keep their correspondence stands as a constant reminder that these women approve of one another as worthy members of a mutually supporting community of self-disciplining women, which was idealized in eighteenth-century conduct literature and modeled in the same works through the image of letter-exchanging women.⁴ Eliza, Mrs. Richman, Lucy Freeman, and Julia Granby, who later joins this group of friends, all show signs of respect for one another as women who are well-versed in the tenets of female self-discipline; they have been practicing the regimen for many previous years as a group. Eliza's friends' acknowledgment of her virtue, strewn over their letters, should be taken as sincere. Mrs. Richman delineates Eliza to Boyer as a girl who has

⁴ For the cultural function of letter-writing in the early Republic to construct social relations based on feeling, see Weyler, Chapter 1; Fliegelman 29; Shields 318-9.

“an excellent heart [...] and reflecting mind, a great share at sensibility and a temper peculiarly formed for the enjoyments of social life,” the last attribute of which list could explain occasional “juvenile indiscretion” but is by no means a serious fault to outshine all her virtuous qualities (116).

This acknowledgment of Eliza’s virtue and history of self-regulation explains why her friends initially believe that Eliza will eventually find the sense to see through Sanford’s deceitfulness and commit to Boyer, and later become perplexed at Eliza’s failure to show such discernment and commitment. When Sanford first approaches Eliza during her visit to the Richman’s in New Haven, Mrs. Richman is wary of Sanford’s reputation as a rake but trusts Eliza’s prudence and does not forcefully discourage Eliza’s interactions with him in social meetings. It is also Eliza’s inner virtue that Mrs. Richman and Lucy repeatedly invoke to prove why Eliza can never find real happiness from associating with Sanford. The fact that these women are Eliza’s friends, who have genuinely respected and cared for her, is brought home in Lucy’s letter, which contains her first reaction to the news of Eliza’s lonely death in a remote tavern in Danvers after childbirth. She writes:

Our days of childhood were spent together in the same pursuits, in the same amusements. Our riper years increased our mutual affection, and maturer judgment most firmly cemented our friendship. Can I then calmly resign her [Eliza] to so severe a fate! [...] No; she shall still live in the heart of her faithful Lucy; whose experience of her numerous virtues and engaging qualities has imprinted her image too deeply on the memory to be obliterated. However she may have erred, her sincere repentance is sufficient to restore her to charity. (240)

Often Eliza’s friends’ emphasis on her repentance at the end is interpreted as their appreciating Eliza more as a dead but morally redeemed woman than acknowledging Eliza as a living

woman in moral peril.⁵ However, the recurring signs of these women's respect for Eliza as a woman who has constantly practiced self-review with them, evidenced in their letters, discourage the reader from accepting this rather cold interpretation. Instead, Mrs. Richman's, Lucy's and Julia's repeated reminders of Eliza's repentance after her death appear to be their effort to do whatever they can do for their cherished and now deceased friend. Virtue was one of the aspects they loved about Eliza and they try to remember it as a way to commemorate their friend.

The letter form maximizes the visibility of the difference between Eliza's and her friends' opinions on a single woman's behavioral propriety. At the same time, the letter form reminds the reader that these correspondents are members of a female friendship network which has long been using letters to confide in and monitor each other's lives so that they can together mold themselves to fit the culturally acclaimed tenets of female self-discipline. Using the letter form, Foster converts what could have been a display of Eliza's aberrant thoughts as juxtaposed to her friends' lectures on socially sanctioned views of female propriety into a situation of moral disagreements within a group of self-disciplining women.

When we recognize Eliza and her friends as self-regulating women who are arguing about moral propriety, we come to understand the source of the standstill among these women on the issue of Eliza's relationship with Sanford in a new light. I have reviewed how a moral disagreement with her friends can trigger a dilemma for a woman about whether to follow her inner moral judgment or her friends' advice, each of which are favored by the two different models of self-disciplining woman in the late eighteenth-century discourse of women's self-discipline. Eliza's and her friends' letters show that these women feel the pull of these two

⁵ For example, Stern writes that Eliza's death allows her female friends and the republican elite social circle they represent to perform "the definitive entombment and selective *re-recovery* of the heroine's reputation through fetishistic rituals of memorial" (145).

different imperatives, which contribute to Eliza's prolonged adherence to her own judgments and to her friends' hesitance to force their opinions on Eliza.

Eliza is conscious of the cultural imperative for a self-disciplining woman to follow her friends' advice. However, she decides to put more weight on the command of the other model, that is, to heed her own inner judgment. To think of her thoughts as the voice of an inner monitor is the primary reason why Eliza continues condoning her attraction to Sanford despite all her friends' warnings. Eliza's letters show many signs that she identifies herself as a self-disciplining woman who is capable of making her own moral judgment successfully. When she finds herself disagreeing with other people's thoughts and actions, Eliza does not hesitate to defend her behaviors and ideas as based on her reasonable and legitimate understanding of virtue. When Mrs. Richman advises Eliza that "the round of fashionable dissipation is dangerous," referring to Eliza's fondness for social gatherings and fashionable men like Sanford, Eliza writes to Lucy that "I despise those contracted ideas which confine virtue to a cell," showing her confidence that her own more accommodating idea of virtue is not less upright than Mrs. Richman's more rigid one; she adds "Mrs. Richman has ever been a beloved friend of mind; yet I always thought her rather prudish" (114). When Sanford threatens Eliza that she will not be happy in the society of Mr. Boyer's parishioners if she marries him, again Eliza answers that "I have been accustomed [...] and am therefore attached to men of letters; and as to the praise or censure of the populace, I hope always to enjoy that approbation of conscience, which will render me superior to both" (144). This passage reveals Eliza's confidence that her inner monitor is strong enough to make her impenetrable to external monitors' scrutiny. In other words, Eliza identifies herself with the model of the self-disciplining woman as a morally autonomous individual who is not afraid to listen to and give voice to her inner judgment on moral issues, in this case, the propriety of her own actions as a single woman.

This strong self-identification as a morally autonomous woman hinders Eliza from listening to and applying her friends' advice to her actions, even when she constantly asks for

them. Eliza talks to and writes letters to Mrs. Richman and Lucy that report events around her and ask for their advice. However, when they offer advice that Eliza does not actively ask for or when their opinions criticize Eliza's actions that she herself does not doubt, Eliza bristles that, even though she generally welcomes and cherishes her friends' advice, they should not try to have too much influence on her judgment and actions. Ultimately, Eliza firmly believes that the final moral decision should be her own, true to the premise of self-disciplining woman as a morally autonomous individual.

This defensiveness over her moral autonomy isolates Eliza from her friends and drives her toward Sanford only with an increasing force as the novel progresses. The tendency even makes her rebel against her mother, who she has once described as "the faithful guardian and guide of my youth; the unchanging friend of my riper years" (135). Right after Boyer gives Eliza an ultimatum that she should choose between marrying him and remaining friends with Sanford, Mrs. Wharton refuses to let Sanford meet Eliza when he visits their house. When Eliza finds out about her mother's action after a few hours, she speaks to Mrs. Wharton in anger that "I thought myself capable of conducting my own affairs; and wished [Mrs. Wharton] not to interfere, except by her advice, which I should always listen to, and comply with when I could possibly make it consistent with my inclination and interest" (176). Only when her meeting with Sanford causes the withdrawal of Boyer's proposal, who walks in on Eliza's and Sanford's meeting, does Eliza regret that she has not followed her mother's and friends' advice more faithfully. She decides that "to her [Mrs. Wharton] will I confess my faults, in her maternal breast repose my cares, and by her friendly advice regulate my conduct," and regrets "Had I done this before, I might have escaped this trouble, and saved both her and myself many distressing emotions!" (179). Throughout the novel, Eliza struggles between the idea of attending to her inner judgment and that of following her friends' advice despite her reluctance, both ideas that are reflected in the two models of self-controlling woman presented in conduct literature that Eliza may have read and discussed with her friends.

It is not only Eliza who hesitates between the two opposite commands of the two models of self-disciplining woman. Eliza's mother and friends also cannot urge Eliza to follow their advice forcefully enough because they recognize and respect Eliza's insistence on her moral autonomy as having a legitimate root in the period's discourse of woman's self-control. As a result, they stall in forcing their opinions on Eliza until the situation becomes absolutely perilous. When Eliza first starts to write about Sanford, Lucy tempers her advice by declaring she does not intend to impugn Eliza's ability to discern proper actions. Lucy writes: "You [Eliza] will ask, perhaps, whether I would influence your judgment? I answer, no; provided you will exercise it yourself" (124). It is this respect for Eliza's moral autonomy that also impedes Mrs. Richman from leading Eliza completely away from Sanford's company, even when Mrs. Richman herself does not have any doubt that Sanford is an unalterable rake. When Eliza is more isolated and the harmful effect of the Sanford's company has become increased, still Eliza's mother keeps this code of respecting Eliza's moral autonomy and fails to forestall the resumption of the rake's advances to her daughter. When Eliza says she should visit Sanford's house, Mrs. Wharton merely replies "Act [...] agreeably to the dictates of your own judgment" (199). Davidson interprets such a weak intervention of Mrs. Wharton in Eliza's decisions as the sign of ineffectiveness of Mrs. Wharton as a mentor figure (*Revolution* 230-1). However, we can understand Mrs. Wharton's hesitancy in interfering in her daughter's judgment as her way of balancing between two cultural models of self-disciplining woman.

It takes Julia Granby, a younger woman in this community of friends, detecting Sanford intimately whisper to Eliza in a deserted parlor to make Julia finally declare that Eliza has become incapable of moral autonomy and begin to really force her opinions on Eliza. Julia writes to Lucy that "She [Eliza] has not the resolution to resist temptation, which she once possessed. Her mind is surprisingly weakened! She appears sensible of this; yet adds to it by yielding to her own imbecility" (211). It is then that Julia abandons any reservation for the respect of Eliza's inner monitor in her criticism of Eliza's action. Julia openly upbraids Eliza for

her blindness to Sanford's deceitfulness and to the social ignominy Eliza brings on herself by allowing such a degenerate man to access her person. At this castigation Eliza again tries to remind Julia of her own capability of independent moral judgment—"Do you imagine [...] that I [Eliza] would listen to such a theme [a tale of love] from a married man?"—and later blames her friends' disrespect for her autonomy by lamenting "I know not how I have forfeited [my friends'] confidence [in my judgment]" (209). This time, however, Julia replies without hesitation: "By encouraging that attention [...] and receiving those caresses from a married man, which are due from him to none but his wife!" and continues to list reasons why Eliza's liaison with Sanford is morally unacceptable. This unhampered and open criticism ends only when Eliza "burst[s] into tears" (209-10). This is the point where Eliza's friends, as well as Eliza herself, cease to take her moral autonomy into consideration, but this breakthrough in Eliza's friends' hesitation arrives too late in the novel to help Eliza to terminate the relationship with Sanford.

In this way, the vacillation between the model of the morally autonomous woman and that of an obliging friend and monitor causes both Eliza and her friends to be caught in a long-stretched standstill, which generates pain for all the members in the friendship. Thus, the majority of *The Coquette* is a demonstration of the actual havoc that can be caused by the conflict between the two cultural models of self-regulating woman that circulated in post-Revolutionary America. Trying to follow the two models of virtuous woman, which they internalized from the teachings regarding women's self-control, Eliza and her friends bear the consequences of what was originally a conflict on the discursive level in their own lives.

Foster does not inaugurate this criticism of the rhetorical flaw in the discourse of female self-discipline—the co-presence of two conflicting models of the ideal self-regulating woman—as the main message of *The Coquette*. Instead, Foster dedicates the last part of the novel to dissolving the situation of moral disagreements among self-regulating women that she has created, so that the novel's overt message becomes decidedly in favor of the message of woman's self-control. Foster annuls the disagreements among the female friends by making

Eliza, the single person who has been holding one end of the debate, retract in the last part of the novel all her former statements about her alternative system of understanding propriety. Eliza renounces her unique moral standards such as fancy, imagination, heart and disposition, which she believed to be the voice of her inner monitor, and confesses that they were products of her coquettish character and delusion. Formerly, Eliza has declared that fancy can have a share in judgment to defend her inclination toward a life of luxury and grandeur that Sanford signifies. However, in her last letter to her mother, Eliza defines all her previous belief in the legitimacy of fancy and imagination as a result of her "own indiscretion," and "the intrigue and artifice of a designing libertine," who encouraged Eliza's defense of her eccentric notions of propriety. Eliza also ruthlessly denounces her former commitment to granting freedom to her heart and procuring sources of pleasure that appease her natural disposition, which kept her from committing to any one man. Summarizing her past behaviors to Julia, Eliza states that the cause of her past behaviors can be found "in that unrestrained levity of disposition, that fondness for dissipation and coquetry which alienated the affections of Mr. Boyer from me" (222).

Along with invalidating her assumed inner monitor by renaming all her past judgments as products of indiscretion and coquetry, Eliza completes the disintegration of the standstill with her friends by crowning her friends' advice as the voice of reason and truth. In the chaise that carries her and Sanford toward Boston where she intends to give birth to Sanford's child, Eliza gives him a long conclusive lecture, in which she summarizes that it was Sanford's sin to destroy a woman's life by seduction, while it was Eliza's fault to facilitate Sanford's art "by the practice of coquetry and its attendant follies!" Then she states: "But I cease to reproach you. You have acted but too consistently with the character, which I was sufficiently apprised you sustained. The blame then may be retorted on myself, for disregarding the counsels, warnings and admonitions of my best friends" (233-4). By this statement Eliza, along with Foster, is declaring that there has never been a justifiable conflict between the two legitimate moral

standards. By making Eliza herself renounce all her previous moral judgments as faulty, Foster disintegrates the problematic situation of disagreements among self-regulating women and ends the novel with the more familiar situation in seduction novels which features the heroine failing at self-discipline despite her friends' rightful advice.

How can we understand this change of track at the end of *The Coquette*? Is Foster presenting a rhetorical flaw in the discourse of female self-discipline? Or is she essentially repeating the main tenets of women's self-control, with the display of Eliza's eloquent self-defense intended only to heighten the dramatic effect of her repentance at the end? I suggest we can consider that Foster is making both statements in *The Coquette*. Eliza's conclusive confessions at the end leave little room for the reader to doubt that Foster wants to emphasize loud and clear the importance of women's self-control and following the sage advice of trustworthy friends. At the same time, however, the situation of a moral argument among friends and the portrayal of a group of women vacillating between two cultural models of the ideal woman still remain within the text, pointing to the rhetorical flaw within the discourse of female self-control. If we do not attempt to decide which is closer to the author's official stance, favoring or questioning the discourse, then we can consider this novel's structure to accommodate both positions: to emphasize the important message of female self-control and yet to demonstrate the confusion a woman may experience because of disparate teachings within the discourse. As Foster grants her women characters letters that they use to demonstrate their thoughts in whichever way they like, we can imagine that Foster has used the whole text as a site where she expresses all her thoughts about the influential discourse of female self-discipline, both her affirmation and reservation. In that case, a student of early American literature could perhaps learn from examining the way the author employs the form of epistolary fiction to articulate these two views, as much as from trying to decipher the author's conclusive stance upon the discourse of female self-regulation.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In this study, I have reviewed Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* and Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* to understand the two authors' observations about the rhetorical soundness of the discourse of female self-discipline, and how they use fiction to express their views. In both seduction stories, the events around Charlotte and Eliza cannot be explained without considering the social expectations for women's behavior, which was influenced by the discourse of women's self-control in post-Revolutionary America. The seduction plot of the two stories link them with the cultural message of women's self-control, because the story of a woman's fall through seduction and abandonment can have a dramatic impact only against a social backdrop in which women's roles and behaviors were prescribed and propagated throughout the print realm.

Yet, the existing scholarship shows that, unlike straightforward didactic tracts, early American seduction stories could both support and question the cultural emphasis on women's self-control. The story of a young woman's fall occasioned by seduction is an apt tool to deliver the message that the teachings on women's self-control in conduct texts are not merely moralists' repertory but real survival lessons that help the woman reader to escape the ignominy and pain the heroines in the stories go through. However, the detailed description of the way the heroines should keep falling without much hope for redemption may also have led the eighteenth-century reader to have a critical look at the cultural emphasis on women's propriety. The coexistence of different scholarly views on this issue suggests that it is their fictional form that enables seduction stories to accommodate a wide array of messages regarding the mainstream discourse of female virtue in the early Republic. It is for this reason that I suggest

that the existing scholarship on early American seduction novels calls for a more thorough examination of the formal attributes of these stories.

This study began with the premise that, even though all seduction stories adopt the popular seduction plot, some authors experimented with the fictional narrative as a form, and that examining the formal structure of those seduction stories can also provide an insight into the authors' comments on women's status in their society. In this study, I applied this focus on the formal structure to *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette*, and tried to glean the authors' message about the discourse of women's self-control by exploring how they build their narratives to accommodate their views. Rowson and Foster both use a textual tool to convert the heroine-centered seduction plot into the parallel structure, in which both the heroine and the other characters become the two focal points in the story. Instead of commenting on the cultural discourse of women's self-control as a whole, Rowson and Foster use the narrative parallel structure to display their observations about the validity of a particular rhetoric involved within the discourse, that is, the rhetoric of rewards employed in the writings about female self-discipline in the early national period. Using the two subplots created by the commanding narrator figure, Rowson questions in *Charlotte Temple* the viability of each of the two rewards writers presented for the self-disciplining woman, moral autonomy and supportive friends and mentors. In *The Coquette*, Foster uses the epistolary form to create a situation of moral disagreement among self-disciplining women through Eliza and her friends. Eliza and her female friends, captured through their letters as female friends arguing on the issue of a single woman's proper behavior, highlight the conflict between the two models of self-disciplining woman circulated in the period's literature of female virtue. Though they as friends have collaborated over years in one another's self-review and self-regulation, Eliza and her friends still fall victims to the confusion between the two models of self-disciplining woman. In these female characters Foster reflects the woman reader in late-eighteenth-century America who experienced a similar confusion.

What I find interesting in both novels is how the authors feel free to shape their narratives whichever way they want to express their social and cultural observations. Rowson creates the narrator who freely alternates between unleashing and restraining her comments and from providing close-up views of a character's psychology to delivering conclusive reports of character profiles; using this narrative free rein, the narrator single-handedly carves out two subplots mentioned above. Foster also does not force her novel to represent one conclusive stance toward the cultural emphasis on women's self-control. Instead, Foster uses the letter form to let her female characters reflect the rhetorical flaw within the discourse of female virtue, but also makes her heroine avert her stance at the end and in that way leaves the last clear message that women should follow the rules in conduct literature. This leads me to conclude that, when we focus on the narrative structure of each individual seduction story, what we find is not necessarily the author treating her novel as a podium for social and cultural commentary. Rather, we may find the author who freely tinkers with the form of fictional narrative; in this case, the cultural commentary in these stories about the discourse of female virtue is not the ultimate aim so much as part of the overall narrative experimentation.

In this study, I have argued that the focus on the formal structure of *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* contributes to revealing experimental aspects of the authors Rowson and Foster. I suggest that we can gain a richer understanding of early American seduction stories if we focus on one story at a time and explore what kind of formal structure and machinations are at work and what they imply about that specific author's experiment with the fictional narrative form. In his study *The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1860*, Herbert Ross Brown has recognized similar traits in many fictional stories in the early Republic and denominated them as "the sentimental formula" (176). Such recognition of generic traits is important to demarcate this group of stories as the genre of "early seduction stories" or "early sentimental novels." However, I suggest that we have reached the point where we can learn more about early American seduction stories by taking each individual story out of the generic category and reviewing its

structure to find the signs of the author's unique experimentation with the combination of the well-worn seduction plot and the protean fictional narrative. Focusing on the formal structure of individual stories in search of uniqueness may lead us to a deeper understanding of the genre of early American seduction stories.

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