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"Got to pull on our pants and get great" : the feminism of Leta S. and Harry L. Hollingworth

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**“GOT TO PULL ON OUR PANTS AND GET GREAT”:
THE FEMINISM OF LETA S. AND HARRY L. HOLLINGWORTH**

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

Mary Ann May-Pumphrey

May 1998

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ABSTRACT

“GOT TO PULL ON OUR PANTS AND GET GREAT”: THE FEMINISM OF LETA S. AND HARRY L. HOLLINGWORTH

by Mary Ann May-Pumphrey

Leta Stetter Hollingworth and Harry Levi Hollingworth were born into poverty in Nebraska during the 1880s. After their graduation from the University of Nebraska in 1906, they went on to earn Ph.D.s at Columbia University, where they afterwards enjoyed successful careers as academicians. They are both remembered as pioneers in the field of psychology. This thesis examines their childhoods, their undergraduate days at the University of Nebraska, the early years of their marriage, the ground-breaking work by Leta Hollingworth in the psychology of women, her feminist activism, the relationship between Leta Hollingworth's views on motherhood and the absence of children in the Hollingworth union, and finally Harry Hollingworth's reaction to his wife's untimely death.

The emphasis throughout this study is on the Hollingworths' shared belief in the equality of the sexes. Their feminism was in large part responsible for the success of both their individual careers and their thirty-one-year marriage.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Leta Anna Stetter and Harry Levi Hollingworth had much in common, even before they met. Both were born during the 1880s in Nebraska, which had been a state only since 1867. Both lost their mothers while they were still toddlers and eventually acquired stepmothers who raised them. Stetter's father was physically absent during most of her childhood, while Hollingworth's father was emotionally absent. Stetter and Hollingworth were among the small minority of individuals who graduated from high school in Nebraska near the turn of the twentieth century. Hollingworth taught in rural Nebraska's one-room schoolhouses before entering the University of Nebraska; Stetter taught in such schools after her graduation from the same university.

After Stetter and Hollingworth pledged themselves to each other as undergraduates, the commonality of their interests and experiences continued. Each of them went on to do graduate work at Columbia University in New York City, Hollingworth earning his Ph.D. in 1909 at the age of twenty-nine, and Stetter earning hers in 1916 at the age of thirty. Both went on to highly successful careers in academia, Hollingworth at Columbia's Barnard College, and Stetter at Columbia Teachers College. Both are remembered as pioneers in the field of psychology in the United States.

The success they achieved in both their careers and their thirty-one-year marriage is largely attributable to yet another common thread in their lives--feminism. This aspect of their lives is the focus of this work. Leta Stetter Hollingworth devoted herself to the

psychology of women for the first decade of her professional life, publishing many works in both professional and popular journals. Hence, she figures more prominently in this study. Yet Harry Hollingworth did more than merely pay lip service to his wife's feminism. His career, along with his role in her career, give ample evidence of his own egalitarian views, as does his role in their marriage.

I first learned of Leta Stetter Hollingworth (and by extension, Harry L. Hollingworth) quite by accident in 1995 during my research for a graduate seminar in the history of American women. My research on the treatment of women in obituary columns required me to turn laboriously every page of the three-volume *Notable American Women 1607 - 1950* in search of those women who had died during the twenty-five years immediately following passage of the nineteenth amendment. The word "Valentine" suddenly caught my attention. Valentine is the small town in north central Nebraska where I spent virtually all of my youth. It was also the home of Leta Stetter from the age of thirteen until her graduation from Valentine High School in 1902. The entry for Leta Stetter Hollingworth in *Notable American Women* left me appalled that I had never heard of her accomplishments during my twenty-one years in the state of Nebraska. Like so many accomplished women, she had simply been forgotten.

Unfortunately, the task of bringing her back to life was made quite difficult by another problem in the lives of many accomplished American women--the lack of an archival collection of personal and professional papers. Most of the scholars who have written about her accomplishments have thus relied primarily on her published works, which number over eighty, and her husband's biography of her which was written after her

sudden death in 1939. Following the lead of William Roweton who has done extensive research on Hollingworth's early life, I examined the "Educational Department" columns written by the teen-aged Leta Stetter for the *Valentine Democrat* newspaper. In addition, the biography penned by Harry Hollingworth mentions that Stetter served as literary editor of the University of Nebraska's student newspaper; a painstaking search of the microfilm collection of the *Daily Nebraskan* yielded four short stories which are not mentioned in any of the historiography on her life. One article by Ludy T. Benjamin Jr. mentioned a collection of family letters in the possession of a first cousin, twice removed. These letters provided not only glimpses into the personal side of Leta Hollingworth but also some invaluable comments on the equality of women which had not been brought to light in any previous work.

Oral interviews were conducted with those two surviving relatives of Leta Stetter Hollingworth who actually knew her. At age one hundred and four, Hollingworth's first cousin, Helen Stetter, is surprisingly sound. While it proved impossible to verify her claim that Hollingworth and Margaret Sanger had marched arm-in-arm down Fifth Avenue in a suffrage parade, her assertion did lead to the discovery of a Hollingworth review of one of Sanger's works. Again, this review had not been discussed in any previously published work on Hollingworth.

The second surviving "relative" who was interviewed for this study is Virginia Weischer Florence. From the age of six, when her mother became their live-in housekeeper, until she left for college, Florence lived with Leta and Harry Hollingworth. A few years after Leta Hollingworth's death, Harry Hollingworth married his former house-

keeper. Thus, Florence became Hollingworth's step-daughter, and remained close to him for the rest of his life.

Harry Hollingworth was much easier to resurrect than his wife, largely due to what proved to be the most valuable source material of all--two unpublished autobiographies which were provided by Benjamin Florence, former husband of Virginia Weischer Florence, and executor of Harry Hollingworth's estate. "Born in Nebraska" and "Years at Columbia" were part of Hollingworth's attempts to deal with his grief following his first wife's death, and thus they contain many intimate details of their relationship which were omitted from his published biography on her life. In addition, Helen Stetter, Virginia Weischer Florence, and Benjamin Florence all provided insights on Harry Hollingworth.

Those sources on the life of Leta Stetter Hollingworth that have survived paint a picture of an individual who was above all else generous. The Hollingworths took in her sister, Ruth Stetter, when she was stricken with tuberculosis as a young woman. Despite the fact that they could barely support themselves, they assumed complete financial responsibility for her care, first in their New York City apartment, and later in a sanatorium. Ruth Stetter's death in 1915 represented a major financial crisis, forcing the Hollingworths to obtain credit from the undertaker and to borrow money for a single berth on the train in order to accompany her body back to Nebraska for burial.¹

¹Harry L. Hollingworth, "Years at Columbia," 1940, TMs (photocopy) of unpublished autobiography, 76. The pagination in this manuscript is highly irregular due to several revisions; the version cited herein is labeled "Final Revision" in handwriting at the top of the title page. The Nebraska State Historical Society in Lincoln, and the Archives of the History of American Psychology at the University of Akron (Ohio) each have one of the several versions of this manuscript.

Years later, when the Hollingworths' hard work had led to relative affluence, Leta Stetter Hollingworth lavished gifts on her niece, the only child of her one remaining sibling. Hollingworth paid for her niece's tuition and books at the University of Nebraska, in addition to sending her a monthly allowance. During the summer months, the niece worked at Columbia University at various jobs located for her by Hollingworth. A high point of each summer for both aunt and niece was a shopping trip for the next year's school clothes. Leta Hollingworth insisted that they shop at only the most fashionable stores, and despite the budget she assigned them, she always found some excuse to purchase additional items for her niece.²

Leta Hollingworth's generosity was not limited to her family members. She also provided economic assistance to an array of young people struggling to obtain an education, and to an assortment of people in need of help for whom she had affection.³ Similarly, her generosity was not limited to financial support. A striking example of this can be seen in the address she delivered before the Alumni of the University of Nebraska on 6 June 1938, in conjunction with the honorary Doctor of Laws degrees which were conferred upon both her husband and her.

Hollingworth's remarks reviewed the findings of three studies of notable Americans of the 1920s. One study found that of all the forty-eight states, Nebraska had pro-

²Margaret Chase Tatroe to Pat Johnson, November 1975, TL (photocopy) provided by Pat Johnson.

³Harry L. Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth: A Biography* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1943; reprint, Bolton, Massachusetts: Anker Publishing Company, 1990), 145 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

duced the third highest number of notables in proportion to its population. Another study cited by Hollingworth claimed that Nebraska was one of the states which was gaining on New England in the production of American scientists. The third study pointed out that among institutions of higher learning, the University of Nebraska had produced the third highest number of past presidents of the American Psychological Association. Hollingworth concluded her talk with words seemingly designed to evoke the warmest feelings amongst her audience of alumni:

In its early days Nebraska produced many more intellectual persons per million of the population than the state could itself use. So it exported the surplus for the use of the nation as a whole. Just as it exported its corn, so it exported its youths. When the state thinks of its crops, let it think of its gifted children, one of its main products. The sower that tops the Capitol sows not only corn for the United States, but he sows also ideas into the intellectual life of America, everywhere, through Nebraskans scattered over the nation.⁴

Yet her sincerity cannot be doubted--the nature of the address is vintage Hollingworth. Her introduction of statistical analyses, seemingly quite inappropriate for the audience and occasion, is in keeping with the many articles she published as an academician. Similarly, her emphasis on the production of notables is a reflection of her overriding professional interest in the study of gifted children.

This address was so well-received that the University of Nebraska later published it in a booklet entitled "The Participation of Nebraska in the Intellectual and Artistic Leadership of the Nation." Although she attended this commencement in order to receive an honorary degree, she reciprocated with a far greater act of generosity, one that could be

⁴Leta Stetter Hollingworth, "The Participation of Nebraska in the Intellectual and Artistic Leadership of the Nation," Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1938.

appreciated by all Nebraskans regardless of their educational attainment.

When Leta Hollingworth referred to the number of past presidents of the American Psychological Association who were “produced” by the University of Nebraska, she was in fact speaking of her own husband, among others. Harry Hollingworth’s perseverance to obtain an education in the face of what seems to have been an endless stream of obstacles gives his life the proverbial “rags to riches” theme. He struggled for seven years after his graduation from high school before he was able to enter the University of Nebraska at age twenty-three. These years were filled with an assortment of menial jobs, thankless teaching positions in one-room schoolhouses, and the grating knowledge that he was still under his father’s thumb even as a young man in his 20s. At one point during this period, he lost three years’ worth of his savings in a failed attempt to cure his father’s lifelong stuttering problem. This blow would have meant the end of hope for the average individual in such circumstances, but not for Harry Hollingworth.

Poverty continued to dog him throughout his undergraduate days, and for the first decade or so after his graduation. One of the many hardships Hollingworth endured occurred in March 1907, when he first made his way from Nebraska to New York City in order to begin a graduate assistant position. For the three-day journey by train, he could afford neither a berth in the Pullman car nor a meal in the dining car. Thus Hollingworth was forced to sleep sitting upright in the hard coach seat, or if he was lucky enough to have the adjacent seat to himself, he could lay in a tight coil across the two seats. Eating was also a haphazard undertaking. He knew neither the timing nor the duration of station stops, and many times, a depot had no lunch counter anyway. Hollingworth arrived in

New York City in the middle of a raging snow storm, too late to find anyone at the University. Hence, he was forced to spend his emergency fund on a night's lodging in a hotel. This forced him to make arrangements to postpone paying for his room and board at the University until he received his first paycheck at the end of the month.⁵

This account of Hollingworth's travails as he began his life in New York City is but a small sample of the wealth of material in Harry Hollingworth's two unpublished autobiographies. Despite this, the existing historiography on the Hollingworths, if it can even properly be called that, consists primarily of articles by psychologists and educators on the work of Leta Stetter Hollingworth, many of which were written for a conference held in her honor in 1989, the fiftieth anniversary of her death. Most of these papers explore her work with gifted children, to which she devoted the bulk of her quarter-century career. Her early work developing a psychology of women is the next most frequent topic of study. The dearth of archival material has caused a fair amount of redundancy amongst the works on both topics. Two researchers have broken free of this mold--William Rowenton in his research on Leta Stetter Hollingworth's childhood, and Ludy T. Benjamin Jr., who along with Anne M. Rogers and Angela Rosenbaum published a fascinating account of the Hollingworths' research for a 1911 court case over the possibly deleterious effects of the caffeine in Coca-Cola.

One of the best analyses of the impact of Leta Stetter Hollingworth's work is that of Rosalind Rosenberg in her examination of the intellectual roots of modern feminism. Rosenberg claims that Hollingworth was one of a small number of accomplished female

⁵Hollingworth, "Years at Columbia," 5-9, 13.

scholars who gave rise to the modern study of sex differences. The women have been forgotten, but not their ideas. In Rosenberg's view, "these women formulated theories about intelligence, personality development, and sex roles that not only altered American thinking about the nature of women and men, but also affected the whole course of American social science."⁶

Rosenberg's work is a notable exception to my main criticism of the majority of the works on Leta Stetter Hollingworth's accomplishments, which is that they fail to bring Harry Hollingworth into the picture. His impact on her life should not be underestimated. For the first several years after their engagement, she literally followed in his footsteps. He made the move to New York City on his own, and after he was established, she followed him there. He undertook an outside research project funded by Coca-Cola which provided the means for her to begin graduate studies. He appointed her as his assistant on this project, thereby providing her with her first paid employment in the field of psychology. She abandoned her pursuit of a writing career in order to pursue a Ph.D. in psychology, as he had done. Her dissertation topic was inspired by their joint research project for Coca-Cola. Upon her receipt of the Ph.D., she had two offers of employment--one in academia and one in clinical psychology; she again followed Harry Hollingworth's lead by choosing the former.

This thesis is an attempt to remedy this perceived flaw in the current body of work on Leta Stetter Hollingworth. While it goes over much previously covered ground relating to her

⁶Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres: The Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), xiii.

work on a psychology of women, it focuses as much as possible on the relationship between herself and her husband, from their first encounter as undergraduates in 1903 through his last written remembrance of her in 1954, fifteen years after her death. And just as the knowledge of her childhood is important to an understanding of the woman she became, so is the knowledge of his childhood important to an understanding of the man he became. Thus we must begin by tracing the parallel tracks of their childhood.

Map of Nebraska depicting those towns of significance to Stetter and/or Hollingworth during their early years. Omaha, Nebraska's largest city, has also been shown for reference purposes.

Chapter Two

Leta Stetter Hollingworth's Early Years: A Litany of Losses

Leta Anna Stetter was born on 25 May 1886, in a "dugout" on the side of a hill in western Nebraska, near the town of Chadron. The dugout was the home of her maternal grandparents--Mary Blair Danley and Samuel Thomas Danley--who had led a wandering sort of life since emigrating to Nebraska from Illinois in 1879.¹ In 1884, the family, including twenty-two-year-old Margaret and twenty-four-year-old William, began homesteading the area on which the dugout was located.² The next year, over the objections of her parents, Margaret Danley married Johnny G. Stetter of Valentine, another small Nebraska town approximately one hundred forty miles to the east.³

Johnny Stetter had emigrated to Valentine, along with both of his brothers and their half-brother, from Richmond, Virginia, in the 1870s. Their parents were dead, and Reconstruction provided scant opportunity for ambitious young men of the South. In Valentine, the Stetter brothers prospered at a variety of business enterprises, including ranching and running a meat market.⁴ Johnny Stetter was perhaps best known as co-owner of the Pal-

¹ Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth*, 8-9.

²Ibid., 8, 12.

³William E. Roweton, "Leta Stetter Hollingworth: Her Childhood Years in Northwest Nebraska," 1986, [results of research project funded by the Nebraska Committee for the Humanities], TMs (photocopy), 29-30.

⁴Ibid., 18-19.

ace Saloon and pool hall, located on Valentine's Main Street in the center of the downtown area.⁵

Johnny Stetter was disappointed that his firstborn was a girl. Margaret Danley Stetter expressed a sense of feminist outrage over his reaction in a journal she kept of the infant Leta's first year. This account purported to be the infant's own version of events:

As soon as I saw Mamma I knew I would like her and we would have a nice time together. She was so glad that I was a girl instead of a boy. . . .

Wednesday morning I heard Grandma tell Mamma that she saw somebody walking up the road with a white hat on. Mamma said, "Maybe it is Johnnie." Then I heard the door open--a man came in, walked up to the bed, kissed Mamma, then took me up in his arms, sat down on a chair by the side of the bed and took a good look at me--laughed--and said, "It's the prettiest baby I ever saw."

I was looking at him too--I had been waiting eight days to see him and now I was wondering how well we could like each other. I had just about made up my mind that I was going to love him a great deal, when he said, "I'd give a thousand dollars if it was a boy."

That made me so mad but I could not talk and tell Papa what I thought of him just then. It made Mamma angry too I think, because she said, "I would not give her for half a dozen boys. . . ."

I did not like Papa very well yet because he had said he wished I had been a boy.⁶

The journal also revealed Johnny Stetter's abdication of his responsibilities as husband and father. During the first seven months of Leta's life, her father was present for just six "visits." Absent at the time of her birth, two telegrams were needed to drag him away from his life in Valentine to his in-laws' dugout near Chadron in order to meet his new daughter. The sixth recorded visit was also instigated by Margaret Stetter, who fearing that her influenza-stricken daughter might die, "sent a telegram to Valentine for Papa

⁵Ibid., 47.

⁶Margaret Danley Stetter; quoted in Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth*, 15-19.

to come.”⁷

Another daughter--Ruth--followed Leta in 1888, and a third--Margaret Carley--in 1890. Margaret Danley Stetter died the day after her third daughter was born, when Leta was not yet four years of age. It then fell to the maternal grandmother and grandfather--fifty-one and fifty-six years of age respectively at the time--to raise the three little girls.⁸ After six more years of futile struggling to farm in an arid land better suited for ranching, the Danleys abandoned the effort and moved into Chadron, where Leta and her sisters attended their first “graded” school after several years of education in one-room school-houses while living on their grandparents’ homestead.⁹

Their first year in the “town school” in Chadron brought still more losses to Leta Stetter and her mother’s family. Fire broke out in the early morning hours of 3 September 1896 in the Chadron home of William A. Danley, the girls’ maternal uncle. His four-year-old and one-year-old daughters perished in the blaze; his wife Jenny Danley was carried out unconscious, while Danley himself was “stupefied by smoke.”¹⁰ An investigation by the coroner’s jury concluded that the fire had been deliberately set in three places in the bedroom shared by the family; either kerosene or gasoline had been used as an incendiary. The evidence clearly pointed to either Jenny or William Danley. Both doors to the house

⁷Ibid., 18-19.

⁸Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth*, 13.

⁹Roweton, “Leta Stetter Hollingworth,” 36-38, 40.

¹⁰“Babes Perish in Flames,” *Dawes County (Chadron, Nebraska) Journal*, 4 September 1896, 8.

were locked; the bedroom window gave no sign of a break-in; a tin sprinkling can of milk was found to have traces of kerosene in it; and most damning of all, two of the three locations at which the fire was started were underneath the couple's bed.¹¹ This evidence, coupled with the stormy nature of the relationship between Jenny and William Danley since she had joined the Christian Scientist group in Chadron must have raised grave suspicions in the mind of ten-year-old Leta Stetter.¹² However, neither Danley was ever formally accused of the crime.¹³

In 1898, the Stetter girls' grandparents moved to Colorado in search of a more productive homestead. Sadly, after just a year in Colorado, Samuel Danley died.¹⁴ Whether Leta Stetter and her sisters accompanied their grandparents to Colorado, stayed with their maternal uncle and his wife in Chadron, or moved to Valentine to live with their father and the second wife he had married in 1896 is unclear.¹⁵ The sisters may have even been split

¹¹"Failed to Find Firebug," *Dawes County (Chadron, Nebraska) Journal*, 11 September 1896, 1.

¹²W. A. Danley, "Autobiography of the Danley family as remembered by W. A. Danley," 18 November 1917; quoted in Roweton, "Leta Stetter Hollingworth," 42-43. Roweton did not cite the location of this biographical statement.

¹³An account of William Danley's suspicious death in similar circumstances is in "Pioneer Here Perishes In Fatal Blaze," *Chadron (Nebraska) Journal*, 1 July 1927.

¹⁴Roweton, "Leta Stetter Hollingworth," 46.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 48.

up during this period. However, by the fall of 1899, school records in Valentine show all three sisters as enrolled.¹⁶

Valentine was particularly proud of its school, an impressive two-story, red brick building, built in 1897-1898; elementary students attended classes in the lower level rooms, whereas the upper story was solely for the high school students. Thirteen-year-old Leta Stetter was promoted upstairs to the ninth grade of high school in the fall of 1899, just eight days after beginning the eighth grade.¹⁷

Her high school days were marred by an unhappy home life. Johnny Stetter, ever the carefree wanderer, left the girls alone with their stepmother for long periods of time. The stepmother was unduly harsh with the girls, forcing them to rise at 5 a.m. and do housework until it was time to leave for school, with the sweeping left for Saturdays and the baking for Sundays.¹⁸ Worse, the girls were forbidden to talk to their beloved Grand-

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., 53-54.

This building still stands on its original location. In 1980, when the school district threatened to raze it, a group of concerned citizens organized a "Save the Old School" committee, which raised eight thousand dollars to purchase the building and lot. Named Centennial Hall in 1983 to commemorate the centennial celebration of Cherry County (of which Valentine is the county seat), it now houses a heritage museum. It is the oldest standing high school building in the state of Nebraska.

¹⁸Leta Stetter, excerpt of letter, 7 January 1908; quoted in Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth*, 28.

mother Danley whenever she would travel to Valentine to visit them.¹⁹ In letters to her future husband a few years later, Leta Stetter was unsparing in her criticism of her father and stepmother: "They ought not to have expected mere children to bear their burdens, yet many and many a night I have gone to bed, and so have my sisters, wearily wondering what a day would bring forth in the way of strife and turmoil."²⁰ Another time, she wrote: "There's no place like home--thank God."²¹ The Stetter sisters often sought refuge in the Valentine home of their uncle and aunt, Henry and Mary Stetter.²² However, like Johnny Stetter, Henry Stetter was an alcoholic with a lack of respect for the female half of the population; one of his frequent utterances was: "Women and dogs belong at home and in the front yard."²³

Despite this repressive home life, Leta Stetter did well academically during her high school years²⁴ and still found time to engage in many extra-curricular activities. In

¹⁹Leta Stetter, excerpt of letter, 25 January 1907; quoted in Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth*, 24-25.

²⁰Leta Stetter, excerpt of letter, October 1908; quoted in Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth*, 31.

²¹Leta Stetter, excerpt of letter, December 1907; quoted in Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth*, 33.

²²Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth*, 93.

²³Henry Stetter, according to his daughter Helen Stetter, 20 May 1986; quoted in Roweton, "Leta Stetter Hollingworth," 67.

²⁴Roweton, "Leta Stetter Hollingworth," 71-72. Roweton included the entire record of Leta Stetter's high school grades.

early 1901, at age fourteen, she began writing a column entitled “Educational Department” for the *Valentine Democrat* newspaper, an activity that continued for the rest of her high school days. One of the recurring topics in this column involved public performances by the high school students in order to raise funds with which to purchase books for the school library. Stetter announced each such performance in her column well in advance of its actual date, provided a reminder for her readers in the column just prior to each performance date, and then supplied a post-performance review; this latter included a detailed accounting of how much money had been taken in from ticket sales, the amount to be deducted for expenses, and the balance remaining to spend on book acquisitions. Stetter also served on the student committee responsible for deciding which books to order, using her column to solicit suggestions from other students, and to notify students when the books had been received.

Some of these columns reflected her early concern with feminism. In one, she posed the question: “Why did Mr. Jeffers not think Miss Carlson and Miss Maxwell capable of being county superintendents?”²⁵ Another reported that: “Mr. Growlen contends that there is a certain statement in Caesar which includes the expression, ‘Women, children and other household utensils’. [sic] If such is the case Caesar has lowered himself in the H. S. girls’ estimation.”²⁶ However, she was not yet beyond employing negative stereotypes of women herself:

²⁵Leta Stetter, “Educational Department,” *Valentine Democrat*, 7 March 1901, 4.

²⁶Leta Stetter, “Educational Department,” *Valentine Democrat*, 17 October 1901, 1.

Mr. Jeffer's skull (not the one he wears) has been described by the H. S. girls as frightful, ghastly, grim, grisly, horrid, terrible and awful. Now when Mr. Jeffers wants adjectives to use in literature work (especially in vizualizing [*sic*] old maids) all he has to do is bring the skull to school and set it up on his desk, when Eureka, immediately he hears more adjectives than he can write down.²⁷

Leta Stetter graduated from the three-year program offered by Valentine High School on 23 May 1902, just two days before her sixteenth birthday. Of the twenty-six students in her class when she began her high school studies,²⁸ just eight remained to graduate on this day--two boys and six girls, including Stetter. Each member of the graduating class addressed the audience in front of a background depicting the class motto, "Rowing, not Drifting."²⁹ Leta Anna Stetter may well have been the force behind the selection of this motto; certainly, it aptly described the pattern of the adult life that she was then beginning.

²⁷Leta Stetter, "Educational Department," *Valentine Democrat*, 2 May 1901, 4.

²⁸Roweton, "Leta Stetter Hollingworth," 53.

²⁹"Commencement Exercises," *Valentine Republican*, 30 May 1902, 1.

Chapter Three

Harry Hollingworth's Early Years: A Conspiracy of Silence

The biggest source of anxiety in Harry Levi Hollingworth's childhood was the "mystery" surrounding his birth. He was born on 26 May 1880 in De Witt, Nebraska, a village in the southeastern corner of the state. He was the first and only child resulting from the 1879 marriage of his parents. His mother, Lizzie Andrews Hollingworth, died when her son was just fifteen months old. Thomas Hollingworth, the baby's father, soon remarried, an act which led the baby's maternal grandmother, Margaret Andrews Spencer, to steal the baby. Thomas Hollingworth was forced into the courtroom to win back the infant. In order to ensure the baby's identification should he again be taken, the capital letter "H" was branded into the palm of his right hand. In addition, Thomas Hollingworth and his second wife, Mittie Gunder Hollingworth, began a long-term endeavor to hide the facts of his parentage from the boy.¹

Harry Hollingworth's first intimation that something was amiss came at the age of seven, when he overheard his parents comment on their having been married five years. Since the townspeople were not party to the conspiracy of silence, they inadvertently added to his confusion. When sent to buy a dozen eggs from a local woman, the young Harry was told, "You look just like your mother." The pale, flaxen-haired boy could see

¹Harry L. Hollingworth, "Born in Nebraska," 1940, periodically revised through 1953, TMs (photocopy) of unpublished autobiography, 77-79, 79a, 96a. The pagination in this manuscript is highly irregular due to several revisions. The Nebraska State Historical Society in Lincoln, and the Archives of the History of American Psychology at the University of Akron (Ohio) each have one of the several versions of this manuscript.

no resemblance with his dark, black-haired “mother.” At other times, when he was peddling foodstuffs about town, a woman would ask him, “Do you remember your mother, Harry?” Since he would have just come from home where his “mother” was busily working, such a question seemed quite strange. Once, a man who claimed to be his uncle appeared in the yard where young Harry was playing. This man announced that he would take Harry to the circus where the boy had been wishing he could go. Upon running inside to tell his “mother,” the door was locked, the curtains drawn, and Harry was warned that the “uncle” was a dangerous man to whom he should never again speak.²

This situation lasted until Hollingworth was eighteen years old when his father finally told him the facts of his birth. Although the younger Hollingworth had long since divined that his “mother” was not his birth mother, he did not know the identity of the latter, or of her family, all of whom lived in the vicinity, and who had been forbidden to contact Harry.³ His father exacted a promise that the son would not try to visit his maternal relatives until he reached the age of twenty-one.⁴ However, when Harry Hollingworth was just nineteen, Levi Spencer--his maternal grandmother’s second husband, and the man from whom Harry had received his middle name--died. Thomas Hollingworth relented at this point, in order that both father and son could attend the funeral.⁵ Over forty years

²Ibid., 47, 79, 80a, 199.

³Ibid., 80.

⁴Ibid., 196.

⁵Ibid., 198.

later, in his memoirs, Harry Hollingworth revealed the damage wrought by this conspiracy:

. . . this situation put a barrier between me and my father, and to some extent most others. There was a strong feeling of mystery and a belief that all these people were concealing things from me and were, in a sense, leagued against me. At any rate, frankness, candor and real friendliness were absent from our relationship and I never developed a strong feeling of attachment to our family.⁶

Fortunately, Harry Hollingworth was able to claim that "no boy could have had a better mother than she was to me" of his stepmother.⁷ The same could not be said of his father. Thomas Hollingworth's second marriage produced either twelve or thirteen children, according to Harry Hollingworth's admittedly weak memory on this matter as an adult. Only three survived to adulthood; this unusually high mortality rate was no doubt due in part to the two to three sets of twins amongst the dozen. A severe stutterer with a history of depression which led to hospitalization on more than one occasion, Thomas Hollingworth was sorely tried to provide for such a large family and so many medical bills on his income as a carpenter. His frustration took the form of repressive treatment of his family, especially his eldest child. On one occasion, a book peddler came to town, selling a volume of arithmetic short cuts. Harry Hollingworth earned a dollar demonstrating these short cuts to local businessmen to whom the peddler hoped to sell copies of the book. When his son asked permission to travel with the peddler in order to continue this

⁶Ibid., 80.

⁷Ibid., 81.

lucrative “demonstrating” work, Thomas Hollingworth promptly took the dollar as he denied the request.⁸

Another time, young Hollingworth won third place in a temperance oration contest; the prize was a haircut by the town barber. Harry Hollingworth was quite excited by the prospect for he had never had a haircut from a barber, but he “forgot to reckon with father.”⁹ Thomas Hollingworth visited the barbershop and claimed the haircut himself; upon his return home, he cut his son’s hair in the usual manner with scissors and a pie-tin. Harry Hollingworth expected his father to give him the twenty-five-cent price of the barber haircut he had claimed, but was disappointed in this. Harry Hollingworth “never forgave” his father for this act of cruelty.¹⁰

Because of the effort to guard young Harry from again being stolen by his maternal grandmother, he was schooled at home until the age of eight. Once he entered the town school, he was soon advanced to the “second room,”¹¹ where the students were required to buy writing tablets and paper-bound copies of some of the classics. Harry was aghast because “these meant money and that meant a storm of expostulation at home and chagrin when I arrived at school without them.”¹² He was forced to rely on cut-up wrap-

⁸Ibid., 81, first unnumbered page following 83, 95, 106a, 107, 124.

⁹Ibid., 109.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., 102.

¹²Ibid., 105.

ping paper in lieu of the tablets; his kindly teacher paid for his classics.¹³

Thomas Hollingworth's harsh treatment of his eldest child was not limited to money matters. He refused to let his son play in the streams around De Witt until the boy had learned how to swim. How the boy was to acquire this skill was left unspecified. When Harry Hollingworth eventually announced that he could swim and sought permission to do so with the other boys, his father requested a "demonstration," without any inquiry as to the source of the skill. Upon reaching the stream for the demonstration, the father threw his son into the deepest hole, shouting "Now swim!" Harry Hollingworth paddled for the sandy bank on the opposite side of the stream, thereby having "satisfied the tyrant to the extent that no question was raised thereafter" whenever he wanted to go swimming.¹⁴

Thomas Hollingworth also thwarted his son's attempts at sociability. "Seeing the girls home" was a favorite occupation of young men like his son; Thomas Hollingworth would often "lie in wait" after church to rob his son of this pleasure.¹⁵ He was even opposed to his son's close friendship with any other young man, sneeringly referring to such a friend as his son's "wife."¹⁶ The senior Hollingworth also insisted that the entire

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., 120-21.

¹⁵Ibid., 94.

¹⁶Ibid.

family be in bed with the lights out by ten o'clock since he had to arise early in the morning to drive several miles to the site of his current carpentry job. Harry Hollingworth resented this early curfew as it interfered with his enjoyment of parties with other young people. Furthermore, it prevented him from reading late at night. After finishing high school, Hollingworth's meagerly earnings allowed him to circumvent the curfew by renting a room from a neighbor who gave him a key, a luxury Thomas Hollingworth would not allow his son.¹⁷

The 1896 graduating class of De Witt High School's two-year program was composed of five girls and three boys. The competition for the honor of being designated the class valedictorian had been between one Martha Bothwell and Harry Hollingworth until illness put Bothwell so behind in her work that her grades on the final examinations suffered. Hollingworth was always ashamed to have won the honor in such a manner, particularly in light of the fact that the title of his graduation oration was "The Ideal Man."¹⁸

After his graduation, Hollingworth hoped to obtain a job teaching a one-room country school but soon learned that the minimum age for obtaining a teacher's certificate was eighteen. Thus, he went to work as a carpenter with his father after graduation; when this work fell off in the winter months, he returned to high school in order to be ensured of passing the test for a teacher's certificate. Shortly afterward, his uncle Henry Hollingworth hired him as a clerk in his grocery store. After two years of such menial work as he

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., 116A, 119, 176.

could obtain, Harry Hollingworth procured his first teaching job; unbeknownst to him, the school board was headed by the husband of one of his two maternal aunts.¹⁹

By the end of this first year of teaching, Hollingworth had accumulated about two hundred dollars towards his goal of getting away from home to further his own education. At this point, Thomas Hollingworth proposed that if Harry would allow him to use the money to go to a school for stutterers, he would be in a better position to help his son with his education afterwards. Harry Hollingworth felt that acquiescing was the “loyal” thing to do.²⁰ Sadly, the senior Hollingworth returned from the school, stuttering worse than ever. Undaunted by the fruitless effort for which his three years of savings had been spent, Harry Hollingworth began his second year as a country school teacher.²¹

During this period, Hollingworth became more active than before in the work of his family’s Methodist church.²² A new pastor told him of Nebraska Wesleyan Academy--a Methodist preparatory school--in the state capital of Lincoln. Hollingworth learned that his recently professed intention to enter the ministry would procure a fifty percent reduction in tuition, and that the church maintained a fund, from which he might be able to borrow for other expenses.²³ Thus, in the fall of 1900, at the age of twenty, Harry

¹⁹Ibid., 176-78, 185-86.

²⁰Ibid., 207.

²¹Ibid., 208

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., 209.

Hollingworth finally left home for good. He was jubilant:

The apron strings had been cut. No longer would I have to “be in” by ten o’clock in order to prevent my hard working parent’s insomnia. No worrying adult, so far as I knew, would now be upset because I might be “walking home” with some girl who could not be trusted with my fate or character. If any record of earnings and expenditures should be kept, they would be in my own pocket. I was at last “on my own. . . .”²⁴

His first year at Nebraska Wesleyan Academy was financially harrowing; his diet of rice, boiled potatoes, and Aunt Jemima’s pancake flour left him thin and malnourished by year’s end. On the thirty-mile bicycle trip home to De Witt, he fainted and had to beg a meal from the woman who dwelt in the nearest farmhouse. Upon arriving in De Witt, he learned that there was no prospect of finding carpentry work that summer, so hearing that there was a building boom in Cheyenne, Wyoming, Hollingworth decided to look for work there. He set off on his bicycle, to ride the six hundred miles on roads still deeply rutted from covered wagons. Hollingworth quickly found work with a building contractor, earning a better wage than his father had ever enjoyed. But soon the contractor learned that Hollingworth was not a member of the union, and he was back to looking for work. He found employment as a grave digger for the city but earned only enough to support himself, with nothing left over to finance his enrollment for another year at the Academy.²⁵

Thus, Hollingworth returned to teaching at District 149--the second of the two country schools in which he had previously taught. In his memoirs, Hollingworth claimed: “I took up the old life as if it had never been dropped, so far as externals were

²⁴Ibid., 210.

²⁵Ibid., 217-20, 225-27, 232.

concerned. But internally I lived in a different world.”²⁶ The reason for this metamorphosis was his reading of *History of English Literature*--the textbook for a course he had taken the year before at the Academy. He now knew “dozens and dozens” of books he wanted to read; his accidental discovery of a special Montgomery Ward and Company book catalog allowed him to do just that.²⁷ This year of teaching became “one long and riotous intellectual orgy.”²⁸ It was during this year that his lifelong interest in philosophy and psychology began, with works by authors such as Carlyle, Emerson, Pope, and Spencer.²⁹ In his later years, Hollingworth viewed the little school house of District 149 with reverence.³⁰ It was there that he first began to see his way out of the trap of “poverty, ignorance, and misguided faith” into which he had been born.³¹

Near the end of this 1901-1902 school year, Hollingworth procured a summer job as a carpenter. At the end of the summer, he had two hundred dollars in savings; this sum, along with his earnings as a theme reader in the English Department, made his 1902-1903 year at Nebraska Wesleyan Academy considerably less stressful than the 1900-1901

²⁶Ibid., 232.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., 233.

²⁹Ibid., 234a.

³⁰Ibid., 237.

³¹Ibid., 249.

year.³² By the end of this second year of preparatory work, Hollingworth had acquired a half year's extra credits to apply towards his freshman year at the University.³³ He returned to De Witt to spend another summer working as a carpenter for the same employer as the previous year, elated over the realization that when he next set foot in Lincoln, it would be to register as a freshman at the University of Nebraska. It was "still a long way to the Elysian fields," but twenty-three-year-old Harry Levi Hollingworth was well on his way.³⁴

³²Ibid., 242, 244.

³³Ibid., 250.

³⁴Ibid., 251.

Chapter Four

Undergraduate Years

In the fall of 1902, sixteen-year-old Leta Stetter enrolled as a freshman at the University of Nebraska. For this first year, her family provided her with sufficient funds to live in a comfortable room of a private home; their support also allowed her to focus on her studies and to enter into the campus social life, including membership in the Chi Omega sorority. Her freshman coursework in English, English literature, German, French, and Physical Education reflected her plan to enter into a career in the field of literature.¹

During her sophomore year, this plan was advanced by her appointment as the theme reader for the English literature department, a position she held for the remainder of her undergraduate years.² In addition, she began writing short stories which were published in the *Daily Nebraskan*, the University newspaper. A couple of these stories revolved around the topic of "theme reading," obviously a familiar one to her. Another story--"The Clerk and the Misconceived Theory"--dealt with the topic of marriage. The narrator of this sketch of boarding house residents held a theory "that each individual has something characteristic to distinguish him from every other individual, some personal trait by which he is marked from the crowd, and by which one remembers him when his face and even his name are half forgotten across the years." All of the residents in the boarding house proved the veracity of this theory except for the clerk. His eyes were a

¹Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth*, 39-41.

²*Ibid.*, 41.

common shade of blue, and the horse-shoe stick pin in his tie was like that of many other clerks, as was the worn look of his coat across the shoulders and his occasional neglect of his boots. The clerk and his wife of fifteen years were understood by the other residents to have taken the "light housekeeping" room because it was cheaper for the present. The narrator admitted the couple "were as happy as married people should be, which, I take it, is really the highest degree of happiness to which any one can hope to attain," yet still the clerk was unremarkable, forcing the narrator to abandon her theory. But then one evening, "something happened":

I was sitting on the porch about supper time, and the clerk's little wife had gone down to the gate to meet him. At last he appeared around the corner. How very ordinary he was. His walk even was not different from everybody else's. And then when he saw his wife he lifted his hat to her reverently, courteously, as if she had been his sweetheart. Then they came up the walk together, she telling him of some new wonderful thing she had made for supper. They barely had time to nod "Good evening" as they passed into the house, and they had been married fifteen years.

The narrator's theory was proven true at last. The seemingly ordinary man was "no longer 'The Clerk'"; instead, he was "'the man who lifts his hat to his wife.'"³ The narrator's sense of awe over this formal courtesy in a couple so long married would seem curious were it not for the "fiery furnace" of the author's childhood.⁴

Another story entitled "The Skull" also focused on marriage. In this work, the hero was a young artist intent on painting a portrait of the young woman he loved. Their squabbling over the appropriate apparel for the sittings made it clear that she was con-

³Leta Stetter, "The Clerk and the Misconceived Theory," *Daily Nebraskan*, 31 October 1903, 6. All quoted material is taken from page 6.

⁴Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth*, 33.

cerned with fashion above all else. When at last she was allowed to view the completed likeness, she was gravely insulted, for seen in a certain light, it contained the horrendous image of a grinning skull. She flounced out, with the artist too mystified over the sudden appearance of the image where none had been before, to stop her. After hours of contemplation, he concluded that the skull had “saved” him.⁵

These transparent but nevertheless charming stories clearly reveal the importance of mutual respect to the success of a marriage, in the eyes of the seventeen-year-old Leta Stetter. The husband must demonstrate his respect for his wife, as in “The Clerk.” In turn, the wife must earn that respect; the artist in “The Skull” was “saved” from marriage to a woman not worthy of his respect.

During this sophomore year, Harry Hollingworth first set his sights on Leta Stetter. He had seen her about campus where he had been struck by “a certain pensive quality in her features and a characteristic animation in her activity.”⁶ However, he was quite surprised to discover her interest in the university library’s stack room, frequented primarily by graduate students and “sober philosophy majors” such as himself.⁷ Hollingworth did not yet know the name of this girl wearing the “scarlet Tam-O-Shanter” nor did he realize she was the author of the marginal comments initialled “L.A.S.” on his literature papers.⁸

⁵Leta Stetter, “The Skull,” *Daily Nebraskan*, 12 December 1903, 5.

⁶Hollingworth, “Born in Nebraska,” 279.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*, 279-80.

During their junior year, Harry Hollingworth and Leta Stetter were in some of the same classes and finally became acquainted. They were among half a dozen students selected by one of the psychology professors to form the nucleus of Tau Psi Xi (The Psychological Club) which met for both social and educational purposes. According to Hollingworth, the couple "at once found that they had much in common by way of background, interest, information, and values."⁹

Near the end of this year, Hollingworth joined the Tau Omega fraternity, which he claimed "made considerable difference" in his outlook for the senior year.¹⁰ Until this point, poverty had driven him to shun most social activities, but he was determined to remedy this deficiency. Towards this end, he took out a two-hundred-dollar loan at the beginning of his senior year, using as collateral a life insurance policy specially purchased for this purpose. With the two hundred dollars he earned every summer as a carpenter, he "started off in high fettle to have a royal Senior year."¹¹ Despite the fact that he had to borrow another fifty dollars from a fraternity brother and was financially unable to take part in the Commencement exercises or to have his yearbook photograph taken, Hollingworth never regretted his move. He learned how to dance and to play whist, and made many new acquaintances. Most importantly, without the turn of events brought about by his joining Tau Omega, he "should surely have missed the life long companionship of the

⁹Ibid., 280-81.

¹⁰Ibid., 263.

¹¹Ibid., 265.

Chi Omega” who became his wife.¹² Early in their senior year, Leta Stetter and Harry Hollingworth became engaged, agreeing to “pitch our tent together” whenever that were to become possible.¹³

After his graduation in 1906, Hollingworth sought a fellowship in either psychology or philosophy at several universities in the eastern United States. Thwarted in this attempt, he procured a position as principal of the high school in Fremont, one of Nebraska’s small “cities.”¹⁴ To deal with the disciplinary problems and overcrowding of the high school’s facility, Hollingworth set about creating various “outlets” for the students. What is striking is the egalitarian manner in which he pursued this goal. Just fifteen years after the sport of basketball was invented, a team for the girls of Fremont High School was organized as well as one for the boys. The same was true with the new Glee Clubs. Formal photographs were even taken of all four groups. A school newspaper was started, and plans for a yearbook drawn up.¹⁵ Despite his great success with these efforts, and his resultant popularity, Hollingworth stayed at Fremont High School less than a year, leaving at the end of February 1907 for an assistantship in the psychology department at Columbia University in New York City.¹⁶

¹²Ibid., 265-66.

¹³Ibid., 281.

¹⁴Ibid., 288-89.

¹⁵Ibid., 299, 302A, 302B, 304A.

¹⁶Ibid., 304-6.

Thus began a lengthy separation for Stetter and Hollingworth. Stetter had taken a position as assistant principal of the high school in Hollingworth's home town of De Witt. Fremont and De Witt were sufficiently close to permit occasional visits, but New York City was a world away for young people of limited means. They maintained their relationship via frequent letters and infrequent visits. Just under two years after Hollingworth left for New York City, Stetter went to join him. They were married on the evening of the day she arrived--31 December 1908.¹⁷

¹⁷Hollingworth, "Years at Columbia," 57-58.

Chapter Five

Early Years of Marriage

In May 1909, Harry Hollingworth received his doctorate in philosophy from Columbia University. Leta Hollingworth had helped her husband prepare for the oral examination by writing out translations of the key parts of a German work which he needed to review. The doctorate enabled Harry Hollingworth to obtain a position as instructor in psychology and logic at Barnard College for the following academic year.¹

Barnard College had been founded twenty years before, as a separate college of Columbia University dedicated to the education of young women. It received its name from Frederick Augustus Porter Barnard, president of Columbia College from 1864-1889. His 1879 report to the trustees discussed for the first time plans to admit women students to Columbia.² Unlike many other American cities during this period, New York City had no degree-granting institution of higher learning for women. However, it took another ten years after Dr. Barnard's initial recommendation before the first class of Barnard College began their studies in October 1889, in a rented brownstone they shared with other organizations. Just fourteen liberal arts students were enrolled in the degree program, with another twenty-two intending to do special work in science.³ By September 1909, when Harry Hollingworth began his appointment as instructor there, the entering freshman

¹Hollingworth, "Years at Columbia," 59, 72.

²Alice Duer Miller and Susan Myers, *Barnard College: The First Fifty Years* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 8.

³*A History of Barnard College* (New York: Barnard College, 1964), 15.

class had grown to eighty-nine students.⁴

Hollingworth's yearly salary from Barnard of one thousand dollars forced the newlyweds to continue to lead austere lives.⁵ Leta Hollingworth tried to obtain employment but was thwarted in this effort.⁶ The most obvious possibility--teaching--was closed to her by law. Section sixty-seven, subdivision twelve, of the By-Laws of the Board of Education of New York City decreed:

No married woman shall be appointed to any teaching or supervising position in the day public schools unless her husband is incapacitated from physical or mental disease to earn a livelihood, or has continuously abandoned her for not less than three years prior to the date of appointment, provided proof satisfactory to the Board of Superintendents is furnished to establish such physical or mental disability or abandonment.⁷

Her attempts to find a publisher for her short stories also met with failure. She described her life during these first years as one of "staying at home eating a lone pork chop."⁸ Occasionally, she would burst into tears without warning or apparent cause, later explaining to her husband that she could hardly bear not being able to contribute to their joint welfare other than via her menial housekeeping tasks.⁹

⁴"Barnard College Reopens," *New York Times*, 23 September 1909, 13.

⁵Hollingworth, "Years at Columbia," 72.

⁶Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth*, 73.

⁷Grace C. Strachan, *Equal Pay for Equal Work: The Story of the Struggle for Justice Being Made by the Women Teachers of the City of New York* (New York: B. F. Buck & Company, 1910), 568.

⁸Leta Stetter Hollingworth; quoted in Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth*, 73.

⁹Hollingworth, "Years at Columbia," 77.

One of the poems she wrote around this time reflected her growing consciousness of the plight of women throughout history. Entitled "The Courtesans," the poem emphasized the extremely limited roles available to the women of ancient Greece. They could be either courtesans whose hearts were "flaming with that subtle sin" or "matrons fair that served the looms."¹⁰ Hollingworth's courtesans were accompanied on an exhilarating walk in the outdoors by three famous personages from the period. Aspasia was a rarity in ancient Greece--a woman intellectual, mentioned by four of Socrates' disciples in their works. She viewed marriage as an encounter between two equals, each of whom must adapt to the other. Pericles, the second ancient Greek to accompany the courtesans in Hollingworth's poem, had an extraordinary love for Aspasia, who lived with him as his concubine. The group was also accompanied by Sappho, one of very few women poets in ancient Greece, and certainly the most famous.¹¹ The poem concludes:

We watched the flocking boats wing out to sea.
The skies of Greece burned wide upon our gaze.
Dream-taught, we conjured up a prophecy
That brightened word by word, till in amaze

We glimpsed a vision on the sands dim brown,--
All women, walking free, within the town!
We were the courtesans of ancient Greece;
Nor time nor death can lull our hearts to peace.¹²

¹⁰Leta Stetter Hollingworth, *Prairie Years* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), 6-7.

¹¹Eva Cantarella, *Pandora's Daughters: The Role and Status of Women in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, trans. Maureen B. Fant (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 54-55, 73.

¹²*Ibid.*

What is particularly noteworthy about “The Courtesans” is the first-person narration.

While it is not certain that Hollingworth identified with the courtesans of the title, she certainly sympathized with them rather than with those other women who “with bated hearts and muted breath . . . spun.”¹³ Hollingworth’s choice of ancient Greeks to accompany the courtesans is also revealing. Aspasia, Pericles, and Sappho can be viewed as representing the power of the intellect, the power of the state, and the power of the spirit, respectively. Clearly, the vision of the future “conjured up” by the courtesans was to be blessed by all three forms of power.

Despite the dark overtones of this poem, the Hollingworths never lost their optimism. Each morning, the first one to awaken would call out to the other: “Come on! Got to pull on our pants and get great!”¹⁴ This was to be their mutual slogan for many years thereafter. In his autobiography, Harry Hollingworth claimed that neither of them actually desired fame as such, but that “only by becoming known could we finally reach a place where the things we were both wanting for both of us could be realized.”¹⁵

Early in 1911, Harry Hollingworth hit upon a means of alleviating their economic woes, a solution which involved one of the South’s most successful post-Reconstruction industries--Coca-Cola. In 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt had signed into law the Pure Food and Drugs Act. Late in 1909, federal agents had stopped a truck carrying Coca-

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Hollingworth, “Years at Columbia,” 77.

¹⁵Ibid.

Cola syrup outside of Chattanooga, Tennessee, and seized its freight, a move dictated by the Justice Department under the authority of the 1906 law. The Coca-Cola Company was charged with selling a beverage that was detrimental to health, because it had been adulterated with a harmful substance--caffeine. By the beginning of 1911, the Coca-Cola Company was preparing its defense for the upcoming trial in Chattanooga. The head of its team of scientific experts, Hobart Amory Hare, proposed that a psychologist be employed to conduct research into the effects of caffeine on mental functioning. After several of his colleagues had declined the offer, Harry Hollingworth became that psychologist.¹⁶

With the trial date a little more than two months away, Hollingworth planned an extensive series of tests, hiring six assistants to carry out them out. Of these six, three were women, including Dr. L. G. Stevenson, Assistant and Medical Adviser, and Leta Stetter Hollingworth, Assistant Director.¹⁷ Both Hollingworths travelled to Chattanooga for Harry Hollingworth's testimony in late March.¹⁸ His research had no impact on the outcome of the trial as the case was dismissed on unrelated grounds a week after his testimony ended.¹⁹

¹⁶Ludy T. Benjamin, Jr., Anne M. Rogers, and Angela Rosenbaum, "Coca-Cola, Caffeine, and Mental Deficiency: Harry Hollingworth and the Chattanooga Trial of 1911," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 27 (January 1991): 42, 44.

¹⁷H. L. Hollingworth, "The Influence of Caffeine on Mental and Motor Efficiency," *Archives of Psychology* 22 (April 1912): 15.

¹⁸Hollingworth, "Years at Columbia," 95.

¹⁹Benjamin, Rogers, and Rosenbaum, "Coca-Cola, Caffeine, and Mental Deficiency," 49.

However, the impact of the research on the Hollingworths was significant in many ways. That year marked Harry Hollingworth's fourth consecutive summer trip to Europe as paid therapeutic companion for the troubled son of a prosperous businessman. It was also the first time that Leta Stetter Hollingworth could afford to accompany her husband on this trip, largely as a result of the remuneration she received for directing the daily operation of the experiment while he was fulfilling his teaching assignments.²⁰ The next year, Harry Hollingworth published the results of the caffeine research as his first book. Given the publicity of the trial and the ongoing controversy over caffeine, this work received a lot of attention, helping to establish him as a pioneer in the field of applied psychology. However, most importantly, their research had at last provided the funds to enable Leta Stetter Hollingworth to continue her own education.²¹

²⁰Hollingworth, "Years at Columbia," 118.

²¹Benjamin, Rogers, and Rosenbaum, "Coca-Cola, Caffeine, and Mental Deficiency," 51-52.

Chapter Six

Leta Stetter Hollingworth and the Psychology of Women

In 1911, Columbia University's psychology department was headed by James McKeen Cattell who was notorious in his opposition to the education of women, particularly if it led to their employment outside the home. He viewed the "vast horde of female teachers" in the country as having a tendency "to subvert both the school and the family."¹ One of Cattell's former students, Edward Thorndike, was professor of education at Columbia Teachers College. He too was opposed to advanced training for women, but at the same time, he was more pragmatic. Since more and more women were filling the ranks of America's teachers, Thorndike reasoned that having a few women at the doctoral level was appropriate. Thus, he hired Columbia's first woman graduate student in psychology--Naomi Norsworthy--as his assistant in 1902.² Six years later, Cattell and Thorndike clashed over the latter's plan to promote Norsworthy to assistant professor; Thorndike won out.

Rosenberg has pointed out that during the first decade of the century, "Columbia became an important center for the growing attack on armchair, evolutionary thinking."³ Thorndike was particularly well known for his enthusiasm for demolishing supposed tru-

¹James McKeen Cattell, "The School and the Family," *Popular Science Monthly* 74 (January 1909): 91-92, quoted in Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres*, 89.

²In 1904, Norsworthy became only the second woman to earn a Ph.D. from Columbia (Elsie Clews Parsons had preceded her in 1899). However, Norsworthy was the first woman to earn her Ph.D. in psychology from Columbia.

³Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres*, 91.

isms. It was into this free-thinking but nonetheless anti-feminist environment that Leta Stetter Hollingworth stepped in the fall of 1911 when she began working towards the degree of Master of Arts from Columbia University. In June 1913, the degree was granted, along with the Master's Diploma in Education from Columbia Teachers College.⁴

Around this time, Hollingworth obtained a position administering mental tests at New York City's Clearing House for Mental Defectives, directed by Max G. Schlapp.⁵ Later this same year, she published a paper entitled "The Frequency of Amentia as Related to Sex," based on her analysis of the records of one thousand Clearing House patients admitted during a period of time in 1912-1913. This paper was the first of many which Hollingworth published in an attempt to refute the widely accepted belief in the greater "variability" of males than females. This doctrine, popularized by Darwin, held that males varied further from their average than did females. Hence, there were more male than female geniuses and more male than female idiots; females tended to cluster around a mediocre norm. Harry Hollingworth undoubtedly influenced his wife's interest in the variability theory; he had questioned its validity in a paper published two years earlier.⁶

Statistics from mental institutions indicated a preponderance of males among their

⁴Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth*, 74.

⁵*Ibid.*, 75. The terms "mentally defective," "feeble-minded," and "amentia" are no longer in common use; they all refer to mental retardation.

⁶H. L. Hollingworth, "Judgments of Persuasion," *Psychological Review* 18 (July 1911): 246, 255-56.

Leta Stetter Hollingworth, "The Frequency of Amentia as Related to Sex," *Medical Record* 84 (25 October 1913): 752.

inmates, which led many scientists to argue that the general male population contained a larger proportion of mentally defective individuals than did the female population. Hence, statistics from mental institutions supported the variability hypothesis.⁷ Leta Stetter Hollingworth's research provided an alternative explanation for these statistics. She maintained that mentally defective females were better able to survive on their own in society to a later age than were mentally defective males. Their primary means of employment--housework--was not as "mentally competitive" as much of the work performed by males. In addition, marriage and prostitution provided many feeble-minded women with means of supporting themselves not available to men.⁸

Early in 1914, as Leta Stetter Hollingworth continued her education at Columbia Teachers College in pursuit of a Ph.D., she published a second article on the variability theory, this time as it related to high achievers rather than the feeble-minded. In "Variability as Related to Sex Differences in Achievement: A Critique," Hollingworth openly criticized the conclusion of Thorndike, her mentor at Teachers College. Thorndike had observed that "in the great achievements of the world in science, art, invention, and management, women have been far excelled by men"; he explained this phenomenon as having its basis in the "greater variability within the male sex."⁹ Hollingworth argued that before accept-

⁷Leta Stetter Hollingworth, "The Frequency of Amentia as Related to Sex," *Medical Record* 84 (25 October 1913): 752.

⁸*Ibid.*, 756.

⁹E. L. Thorndike, *Educational Psychology* (1910), 35, quoted in Leta Stetter Hollingworth, "Variability as Related to Sex Differences in Achievement: A Critique," *American Journal of Sociology* 19 (January 1914): 510.

ing variability as the causal factor, one “should consider *first* the established, obvious, inescapable, physical fact that women bear and rear the children, and that this has always meant and still means that *nearly 100 per cent of their energy is expended in the performance and supervision of domestic and allied tasks, a field where eminence is impossible.*”¹⁰ Her review of the literature led Hollingworth to conclude that the available empirical data was too contradictory for any conclusion on variability as related to sex differences in achievement to be reached. Even if greater variability among males was proven to exist, Hollingworth claimed that it would not automatically follow that this variability was inherent. The sexes had not enjoyed equal opportunities, nor had intellectual variability provided the “survival value” for women that it had for men, because of the different roles played in procreation.¹¹

In mid-1914, Hollingworth published a second paper based on her work at the Clearing House for Mental Defectives. Co-authored with director Schlapp, “An Economic and Social Study of Feeble-Minded Women” studied the cases of 281 women examined at the Clearing House during a fourteen-month period in 1913-1914.¹² The authors described the many costs these women represented to their larger community: hospital expenses, court expenses, funds for homes for foundlings, destruction of property, pain and suffering caused their relatives, and the monies spent by private and public charities in

¹⁰Ibid., 528.

¹¹Ibid., 528-29.

¹²Max G. Schlapp and Leta Stetter Hollingworth, “An Economic and Social Study of Feeble-Minded Women,” *Medical Record* 85 (6 June 1914): 1026.

an attempt to rehabilitate these women. However, the “most pathetic aspect of the problem” was “the suffering of the incompetents themselves.”¹³ Schlapp and Hollingworth concluded that feeble-minded women would be better served if they could be institutionalized as children, rather than allowed to survive in a society that found uses for them as prostitutes and chamber maids.¹⁴

At this same time, Hollingworth was in the process of overseeing the publication of her dissertation, a full two years before she actually obtained her Ph.D. Entitled “Functional Periodicity: An Experimental Study of the Mental and Motor Abilities of Women During Menstruation,” it sought to refute another well-accepted hypothesis of the era--that women’s capabilities were adversely affected during their monthly menstrual cycles. She credited Harry Hollingworth’s monograph on “The Influence of Caffeine on Mental and Motor Efficiency” for first suggesting to her that the effects of menstrual periods on mental and motor efficiency might be a suitable subject for scientific experimentation. In fact, the method she utilized for her doctoral research was “adopted almost bodily” from this monograph.¹⁵

Only one similar study on the effects of menstrual periods on women’s psychological functioning had been made--a 1909 dissertation by Russian N. V. Voitsechovsky. He had concluded that menstruation had “an unquestionable influence on women’s psychical

¹³Ibid., 1028.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Leta Stetter Hollingworth, *Functional Periodicity: An Experimental Study of the Mental and Motor Abilities of Women During Menstruation* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1914), vii.

sphere.”¹⁶ Hollingworth rejected his findings on two grounds. First, Voitsechovsky’s subjects were all aware of the purpose of the experiment, whereas two out of six of Hollingworth’s female subjects were completely unaware of her experiment’s purpose. Secondly, Voitsechovsky had failed to utilize a “control” group such as Hollingworth’s two male subjects provided, in order to ensure the validity of the results.¹⁷ Possibly because of these two differences, Hollingworth’s research results--that “careful and exact measurement does not reveal a periodic mental or motor inefficiency in normal women”--directly contradicted those of Voitsechovsky.¹⁸

Hollingworth was appalled by the stark contrast between “what has been accepted” by men of science and “the figures yielded by scientific method” in her research.¹⁹ She attributed this disparity to the traditional romanticized view of woman as a “mysterious being.”²⁰ Men of science who had no experience with periodicity seized upon it as the source of this mysteriousness. Hollingworth also noted that the taboo surrounding menstruation had made it an unfit topic for experiment by men other than physicians; in turn, physicians were rarely well-informed on the methods of experimental

¹⁶Ibid., 7.

¹⁷Ibid., 9, 12.

¹⁸Ibid., 94.

¹⁹Ibid., 95.

²⁰Ibid.

psychology, so they did not undertake such research.²¹ She concluded her dissertation by exhorting women to investigate such matters experimentally themselves, so that in time a psychology of woman could be written “based on truth, not on opinion; on precise, not on anecdotal evidence; on accurate data rather than on remnants of magic.”²²

Late in 1914, Hollingworth returned to the variability hypothesis in “The Comparative Variability of the Sexes at Birth,” co-authored with physician Helen Montague. Because greater mental variability of males had often been inferred from their supposedly greater physical variability, the authors set out to refute the latter claim.²³ They examined the birth records of one thousand female babies and one thousand male babies born during a three-and-a-half-year period at the New York Infirmary for Women and Children, a hospital located on the lower East Side of New York City. The records contained ten anatomical measurements for each of these babies--weight, length, circumference of shoulders, and seven cranial measurements.²⁴ Since scientists of this period could not agree on what constituted the most satisfactory measurement of comparative variability, Montague and Hollingworth calculated and presented five such measures.²⁵ They found that “whichever figure we take as the measure of variability, there is no indication of any real sex differ-

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., 99.

²³Helen Montague and Leta Stetter Hollingworth, “The Comparative Variability of the Sexes at Birth,” *American Journal of Sociology* 20 (November 1914): 335-36.

²⁴Ibid., 345.

²⁵Ibid., 348.

ence for the anatomy as a whole.”²⁶ Their conclusion called for an abandonment of the hypothesis of greater male variability, suggesting instead that “men have apparently been willing to recognize as a cause of women’s inferior attainment almost any factor except the most obvious and incontestable one, i. e., that they have borne and reared the young and men have not.”²⁷

It was also during the year of 1914 that the city of New York established the first position of psychological examiner under the supervision of the Civil Service. A competitive examination to establish an eligibility list was given the following spring; Leta Stetter Hollingworth headed that list. As a result, she became the first Civil Service psychologist in the city of New York when she accepted the position as examiner for the Psycopathic Service at Bellevue Hospital in 1915.²⁸ Upon receiving her Ph.D. in June 1916, she had two offers of employment to consider--that of Director of the Psychological Laboratory to be established at Bellevue Hospital, and that of instructor in the Department of Educational Psychology at Teachers College. The latter position involved carrying on the work with exceptional children of Professor Naomi Norsworthy, who had just died. Hollingworth’s acceptance of this academic position signaled the beginning of the end of her work

²⁶Ibid., 365.

²⁷Ibid., 369.

²⁸Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth*, 75-76.

in the field of the psychology of women--she published just five more works on this topic.²⁹

Those arguments opposing feminism based on the alleged unfitness of women to undertake some forms of activity were addressed in a 1916 work, "Science and Feminism," co-authored with anthropologist Robert H. Lowie. The authors concluded that "no rational grounds have yet been established that should lead to artificial limitation of woman's activity on the ground of inferior efficiency."³⁰ They based their findings on an examination of the sociological, biological, and psychological differences between men and women. While Lowie and Hollingworth conceded that a division of labor between the sexes was found in most societies, they attributed this to "social custom, due doubtless in each particular case to specific historical causes."³¹ Thus, agriculture was the domain of men in the Pueblo tribe, but the domain of women in the Iroquois tribe. For their biological argument, the authors examined both absolute and relative brain sizes, "for in the popular mind intellect and brain weight are closely associated."³² Both points were quickly dismissed via comparisons of humankind with the animal kingdom. The brain of an elephant was known to be considerably larger than that of a male human; thus a claim for

²⁹Ibid., 92.

³⁰Robert H. Lowie and Leta Stetter Hollingworth, "Science and Feminism," *Scientific Monthly* (September 1916): 284.

³¹Ibid., 279.

³²Ibid., 280.

male superiority could not reasonably be based on absolute brain size. In the case of relative brain size, the authors pointed out that the brain of a rat surpasses that of both male and female human beings.³³ The psychological case presented in "Science and Feminism" appears to have been entirely contributed by Hollingworth, covering her three primary areas of interest in the field--sex differences in mental traits, the variability hypothesis, and functional periodicity. She noted wryly that: "It is amusing to note how every sex difference that has been discovered or alleged has been interpreted to show the superiority of males. . . . Had it been found that there were more females among inmates of idiot asylums, how easily it could have been used as evidence of the general inferior quality of female mind."³⁴

Also appearing in 1916 was "The Vocational Aptitudes of Women," a chapter in Harry Hollingworth's *Vocational Psychology* text. Leta Hollingworth's stated purpose for the chapter was to explore the scientific basis for "the apparently arbitrary and traditional assumption that the vocational future of all girls must naturally fall in the domestic sphere."³⁵ Five topics were examined: inherent sex differences in average intelligence; variability of the sexes with respect to intelligence; possible hindrances to intellectual activity affecting one sex but not the other; instinctual sex differences which might natu-

³³Ibid., 280-81.

³⁴Ibid., 284.

³⁵Leta Stetter Hollingworth, "The Vocational Aptitudes of Women," in *Vocational Psychology: Its Problems and Methods* by H. L. Hollingworth (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1917), 223.

rally lead to vocational differentiation between the sexes; and the reason behind the traditional division of labor between the sexes. Hollingworth relied heavily on her own previously published works on the variability hypothesis and functional periodicity, plus an article on means by which society encouraged women to become mothers that she published at approximately the same time, in order to reach the conclusion that:

In the present state of scientific knowledge it would be as dogmatic (and therefore as undesirable) to state that significant sex differences in intellect do not exist, as to state that such differences do exist. All we can say is that up to the present time experimental psychology has disclosed no sex differences in mental traits which would imply a division of labor on psychological grounds. . . . So far as is at present known, women are as competent intellectually as men are, to undertake any and all human vocations.³⁶

Hollingworth published two more reviews of the literature on comparison of the sexes in mental traits, one in 1916 and the other in 1918.³⁷ Then followed a period of four years before her final work on the psychology of women, an article entitled "Differential Action Upon the Sexes of Forces Which Tend to Segregate the Feeble-Minded." This work was an expansion of her 1913 study of the feeble-minded individuals who were presented for mental examination at the Clearing House for Mental Defectives. The 1922 work presented an additional body of evidence based on 1,142 cases of individuals who had actually been admitted to Children's Hospital, a municipal institution for the feeble-

³⁶Ibid., 244.

³⁷Leta S. Hollingworth, "Sex Differences in Mental Traits," *Psychological Bulletin* 13 (15 October 1916): 377-84.

Leta S. Hollingworth, "Comparison of the Sexes in Mental Traits," *Psychological Bulletin* 15 (December 1918): 427-32.

minded.³⁸ This research merely reinforced the conclusions Hollingworth reached in her 1913 work. However, the "Speculative Interpretations" section discussed a much wider array of possible causes for the preponderance of males in institutions than did the 1913 work. Hollingworth conceded that parents might be more fond of their daughters than their sons and hence less willing to part with them. Conversely, parents might be more fond of their sons than their daughters, and hence, more concerned with seeking mental examinations for boys who appeared to be deficient. Because boys were less restricted, they could more often come into conflict with the law and as a result be referred to mental institutions by the court system.³⁹ Notably absent from Hollingworth's analysis was any mention of women's economic survival as prostitutes, which had figured prominently in her 1913 work. In general, the 1922 study contains fewer feminist overtones than her earlier works; in addition, its purpose and organization are lacking in clarity when compared to her previous writing. More than likely, "Differential Action Upon the Sexes" was created in somewhat of a hurry in order to ensure her promotion to Associate Professor for the 1922-1923 academic year. It clearly reflects Hollingworth's waning professional interest in the psychology of women.

³⁸Leta S. Hollingworth, "Differential Action Upon the Sexes of Forces Which Tend to Segregate the Feeble-minded," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology and Social Psychology* 17 (April-June 1922): 38.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 53.

Chapter Seven

Feminist Icon

Despite the frenetic lifestyle Leta Stetter Hollingworth maintained while attending graduate school, working part-time, and later establishing herself as a member of the faculty at Teachers College, she still found time for feminist activism. Her concern with the role of married women in American society was vividly demonstrated by her response to a contentious issue for Phi Beta Kappa during the years before and during World War I. Hollingworth had been elected to this honorary fraternity for liberal arts graduates upon her graduation from the University of Nebraska in 1906. Although it had been founded the same year that the American colonies declared their independence from England, Phi Beta Kappa did not elect its first women members until 1875. As the proportion of women in the nation's universities and colleges increased, so too did the proportion of women students elected to Phi Beta Kappa. By 1913, the number of women elected as undergraduates was almost the same as the number of men elected as undergraduates.¹

This state of affairs was viewed as a crisis by some leaders of the society by the time of the 1916 National Council meeting. In his address to the assembled delegates, Oscar M. Voorhees, United Chapters Secretary, bemoaned the situation:

¹Richard Nelson Current, "Sisters in the Brotherhood," in *Phi Beta Kappa in American Life: The First Two Hundred Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 177, 179.

There were two other methods of admission to Phi Beta Kappa at this time--election as an alumni or as an honorary member. The number of men elected via these methods remained considerably higher than the number of women thus elected.

The reputation of Phi Beta Kappa to-day rests in part upon the distinctions won and the worthy service rendered by the members who graduated from ten to fifty years ago. Its reputation in the years to come will rest in part upon the work of those whom we are now electing to membership. It will be generally conceded, I think, that a larger share of its reputation must come from its men than from its women members. The way must be kept open to the men, and promising students be encouraged to seek membership. In my opinion there are other marks in undergraduates of the promise of usefulness than mere grades. Is it too much to ask that our chapter officers give this matter careful consideration?²

Voorhees emphasized the need to admit a larger number of men into the ranks of Phi Beta Kappa, without acknowledging the exclusionary nature of such a proposal for women. The delegates to the 1916 Council responded by creating a "Committee on the Proportionate Election of Men and Women," assigning it the task of reporting back at the next triennial Council in 1919.³

Leta Hollingworth's response was sharp and swift. In a letter to the Editor of *School and Society*, she wrote:

That a position so untenable and action so invidious should be taken by the representatives of a body supposedly recruited on the basis of superior intelligence, offers food for ironical reflection. The irony grows when one remembers that less than half a century ago one of the most insistent arguments against admitting women to higher education was that standards of scholarship would be lowered through the inability of the women to keep pace with the men!⁴

Hollingworth agreed with Voorhees that the women members of Phi Beta Kappa had achieved far less eminence than the men elected to its ranks. However, she went on to

²Oscar M. Voorhees, in an address to the assembled delegates of Phi Beta Kappa, 1916; in "Proceedings of the Council," *Phi Beta Kappa Key* (October 1916): 20.

³Current, "Sisters in the Brotherhood," 180.

⁴Leta Stetter Hollingworth, New York City, to the Editor of *School and Society*, 1916, published in *School and Society* 4 (16 December 1916): 932-33.

point out that the reason for this was “that when the women marry, they yield, in nearly all cases, to the public expectation that they will retire from competitive life, and devote themselves to home and children.”⁵ She concluded with the suggestion that women either would have to “be content forever with falling short of the best” or would need to gradually modify social customs, so that they “may both fulfil their intellectual promise and enjoy a normal domestic life, as men have always done.”⁶

Hollingworth did not let the matter drop after writing this letter. Just a week after it was published, she wrote a Christmas letter to Louise Pound, one of her favorite professors from her undergraduate days at the University of Nebraska. After explaining the issue to Pound, Hollingworth concluded with a plea: “Can’t you express yourself publicly somewhere on the subject?”⁷

Voorhees remained impervious to Hollingworth’s stinging rebuke and others like it. At the 1919 Council meeting, he reported that the unthinkable had occurred--in 1918, the number of women elected as undergraduates had surpassed the number of men. However, the Committee appointed by the 1916 Council chose the middle ground between the sides represented by Voorhees and Hollingworth. The results of a questionnaire sent to fifty-six co-educational chapters revealed that many of them were electing a specific per-

⁵Ibid., 933.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Leta Stetter Hollingworth, New York City, to Louise Pound, Lincoln, Nebraska, LS, 24 December 1916, Louise Pound papers, RG0912.AM, Box 1, Folder 3, Nebraska State Historical Society.

centage of male undergraduates and the same percentage of female undergraduates. Such a scheme had already been proposed to the Committee by the Brown University chapter. Thus the Committee, headed by Mount Holyoke College president Mary Woolley, recommended that the Council take no action, leaving the matter of how to elect undergraduate members to the chapters. The 1919 Council adopted the Committee's recommendations, seemingly without realizing that the equal-percentages plan equated to a quota system, one which would limit women's membership in the fraternity.⁸

While Hollingworth seized the initiative in the debate over the Phi Beta Kappa issue, feminists also sought her collaboration. According to Harry Hollingworth, soon after his wife's early works on the psychology of women appeared in technical journals, she was "hailed by the 'feminist' group of women in New York as the much needed scientific pillar for the cause."⁹ As early as 1915, before Leta Stetter Hollingworth had even received her Ph.D., a lengthy article describing her research on the variability hypothesis appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*. Written by Rheta Childe Dorr, this article wryly concluded that the "problem of the modern woman" was one of "how to vary from her type as freely as men vary without giving up her right to bear children."¹⁰

Dorr and Hollingworth were both members of Heterodoxy, a club for feminist

⁸Current, "Sisters in the Brotherhood," 180-82.

⁹Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth*, 91.

¹⁰Rheta Childe Dorr, "Is Woman Biologically Barred from Success?" *New York Times Magazine*, 19 September 1915, 16.

women founded in 1912 by Marie Jenny Howe. Heterodoxy members met for luncheon on alternate Saturdays, followed by two hours of informal discussion on a topic agreed to at the previous meeting. Over a hundred women are known to have been members of Heterodoxy at some point during its approximately thirty years of existence, including such luminaries as birth control activist Mary Ware Dennett, IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) organizer Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, author Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and suffragist Doris Stevens, to name but a few.¹¹

Because Heterodoxy members adhered to a rule that everything said during a meeting was to be held in confidence by all, little is known about the actual content of Heterodoxy meetings. Rheta Childe Dorr broke that rule in her 1924 autobiography on the basis that Leta Stetter Hollingworth's work was so widely published that a description of her lecture before Heterodoxy members was "perfectly proper."¹² According to Dorr, Hollingworth's presentation covered the results of her doctoral research on functional periodicity as well as her inquiries into the variability hypothesis. The latter included Hollingworth's research with Helen Montague into the physical variability of members of each sex at birth. Finally, Dorr presented Hollingworth's examination of the question of why more males than females resided in institutions for the mentally defective, along with

¹¹Judith Schwarz, *Radical Feminists of Heterodoxy Greenwich Village 1912-1940* (Lebanon, New Hampshire: New Victoria Publishers, Inc., 1982), 5, 86-94.

¹²Rheta Childe Dorr, "A Feminist Group in New York," in *A Woman of Fifty* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1924), 271.

her theory on why more men than women achieved eminence.¹³

Harry Hollingworth claimed that “in her own quiet way,” Leta Stetter Hollingworth “took her stand with this group of liberal although somewhat more agitated women.”¹⁴ However, he took his stand too, marching with her in suffrage parades, along with others affiliated with Columbia University.¹⁵ Part of their motivation for such activism undoubtedly stemmed from their midwestern backgrounds. In a letter to a friend from Valentine in the midst of the last few years of the suffrage fight, Leta Hollingworth wrote:

I’ve been interested right along in the progress of suffrage and all the other interests of women out in the West. It’s wonderful how all of those things have developed in the last fifteen years. But the West always has been ahead of the East in most things pertaining to the advancement of women’s status. For instance I never dreamed till I came East that any distinction was ever thought proper between the grade of education given to girls and that given to boys. But I came across it in so many ways here in New York. In the West boys and girls are equal in education, but not so in the East.

... in the course of my endeavors to “amount to something” my eyes have been opened to the scores of obstacles that keep women from living freely, even in our democratic land. To me there is nothing so sad as to look back on the capable, intelligent women I have known, and see how they have been bound down hand and foot by custom, and economic dependence.¹⁶

¹³Ibid., 272-77.

¹⁴Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth*, 92.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Leta Hollingworth, New York City, to Emma Fischer, Valentine, Nebraska, 5 March 1917, LS (photocopy) provided by Kathleen Rutledge.

Chapter Eight

Women and Reproduction

The Hollingworths never had children. Whether this was a mutual decision, Leta Hollingworth's choice, or the result of physical inability is not clear. However, Harry Hollingworth's memoirs contain several references to the subject, and Leta Hollingworth published three articles on the general topic of women and reproduction.

Early on, Leta and Harry Hollingworth rejected careers as a public school teacher and a principal, respectively, on the grounds that "the drudgery and routine would surely thwart our impulses toward more intellectually creative things and might even, if we should have children, block the exercise of these impulses forever."¹ Their fragile economic existence on Harry Hollingworth's salary of one thousand dollars a year as an instructor at Barnard was another factor in their postponement of parenthood: "To think of bringing children of ours into the world under these circumstances was wholly out of the question; if nothing else had done it, the misery of our own life long poverty would have deterred us. So that this issue was immediately disposed of."²

In 1916, when Leta Hollingworth was working as a clinical psychologist at Bellevue Hospital in New York City, she wrote an article entitled "Social Devices for Impelling Women to Bear and Rear Children," a topic Harry Hollingworth claimed was "not unrelated to her own decision to postpone procreation until other urges had been given their

¹Hollingworth, "Years at Columbia," 71.

²Ibid., 72.

due opportunity.”³ In this work, Leta Hollingworth delineated two factors which could deter women from having children. First, not all women possessed a natural “maternal instinct.” She claimed that if such a trait could be measured, it was most likely to yield the same distribution curve as for other traits. At one extreme would be those women with no interest in caring for infants; at the other would be those whose overriding interest was maternal activities. Between these two extremes would fall the vast majority of women--those with a moderate interest in motherhood. Hollingworth posited that a second deterrent to women having children was the fact that “the bearing and rearing of children is painful, dangerous to life, and involves long years of exacting labor and self-sacrifice.”⁴

Because of these two negating factors, society’s leaders were required to devise various means for impelling women to have children, in order to “insure enough increase in the population to offset the wastage of war and disease.”⁵ The first “social device” cited by Hollingworth was that of “personal ideals.”⁶ She was particularly incensed with men of science for portraying the ideal woman as one with a great deal of interest in motherhood. Another similar device--public opinion--was used to influence women to bear children through both positive and negative means. Thus articles containing statistics on

³Ibid., 127.

⁴Leta S. Hollingworth, “Social Devices for Impelling Women to Bear and Rear Children,” *American Journal of Sociology* 22 (July 1916): 20-21.

⁵Ibid., 21.

⁶Ibid.

depopulation made patriotic appeals to women, while other articles denounced women's interests outside maternity as "dangerous," "degrading," and "indicative of decay."⁷

In Hollingworth's view, the two main legal means employed to control women's reproductive lives were the provision allowing a man to divorce his wife on grounds of infertility and the law forbidding the dissemination of information on birth control. She argued that "there could be no better proof of the insufficiency of maternal instinct as a guaranty of population than the drastic laws which we have against birth control, abortion, infanticide, and infant desertion."⁸

Her examples of how art served as a social device for impelling women into motherhood are particularly intriguing. She pointed out that a mother with a child at her breast was the favorite theme of artists; similarly, fiction, poetry, and songs were replete with references to the "sacredness and charm" of motherhood. This emphasis on the positive aspects of motherhood, in combination with a taboo on discussion of childbirth and maternal mortality, served as yet another social device--that of illusion.⁹

Finally, Hollingworth indicted a class of social devices she labeled "bugaboos," which referred to unproven beliefs that were often stated as fact. The drastic consequences of having an only child constituted one such bugaboo; another was the belief that women who delayed childbearing until after age thirty would suffer far more pain and

⁷Ibid., 21-24.

⁸Ibid., 24-25.

⁹Ibid., 26-27.

danger than those women who began reproducing at a younger age.¹⁰

Hollingworth proposed that these social devices should be replaced with “adequate compensation” by societal leaders desirous of a surplus population. She concluded that reproduction of the species could be managed in a more rational manner if these matters were raised in the public consciousness. The result would be an enormous social gain, “assuming always that the increased happiness and usefulness of women would, in general, be regarded as social gain.”¹¹

The overall tone of this first published work on women and reproduction is quite strident. The most striking example of this is in Hollingworth’s drawing of an analogy between child-bearing and the work of soldiers--both were necessary for continued national existence, both involved great personal sacrifice, and both involved danger and in some cases, death. Hollingworth found it “clear, indeed, that the social devices employed to get children born, and to get soldiers slain, are in many respects similar.”¹²

In 1922, Leta Hollingworth’s second work on the topic of women’s biological fate was published. “For and Against Birth Control” was a review of two works--one by the birth control crusader, Margaret Sanger, and another by a medical doctor, Halliday G. Sutherland, who was opposed to contraception. Hollingworth took Sutherland to task for putting the “authority of his professional degree” behind the statement that birth control produced sterility, fibroid tumors, and neuroses without any quantitative data to support it.

¹⁰Ibid., 27-28.

¹¹Ibid., 29.

¹²Ibid., 19-20.

Furthermore, she was rankled by his failure to provide any data on maternal mortality in childbirth, which was approximately two percent at that time. However, Sanger “claimed too much for birth control,” according to Hollingworth. Large segments of the population, particularly those Sanger most wanted to aid, would not be able to utilize the birth control information Sanger wanted to provide them. Birth control education was not the solution to every societal problem in Hollingworth’s view. Nevertheless, Hollingworth clearly valued Sanger’s ability to increase public awareness of the issues surrounding birth control, childbirth, and motherhood:

As an obstetrical nurse, she has seen scores of women undergo childbirth. She has heard what they say. She has herself repeatedly borne children. She has developed a power of speech to tell exactly what she has seen and heard, and she is brave enough to do it. Margaret Sanger’s real contribution is that she proclaims aloud what women have been taught they must smother to whispers.¹³

In the six years between the publication of “Social Devices” and “For and Against Birth Control,” Hollingworth clearly moderated her tone but nevertheless maintained her position that the key to solving women’s biological quandary was to increase their consciousness of the facts. The third and last of her works on this topic--“The New Woman in the Making”--appeared in 1927. Somewhat less harsh than “Social Devices,” it made the analogy between a hungry kitten trapped in a cage with food outside and a woman trapped inside the cage of her “cumbersome reproductive system.”¹⁴ In Hollingworth’s view, the

¹³Leta S. Hollingworth, “For and Against Birth Control,” review of *The Pivot of Civilization* by Margaret Sanger, and *Birth Control* by Halliday G. Sutherland, M.D., *New Republic* (11 October 1922): 178. All quoted material was taken from this page.

¹⁴Leta S. Hollingworth, “The New Woman in the Making,” *Current History* 27 (October 1927): 15.

“Woman Question” was simply the conflict inherent in reproducing the species while simultaneously satisfying other desires and interests in life.¹⁵ She asked whether the Woman Question could disappear, given the recent advances in biological science which made birth control a reality.¹⁶ Her negative answer was based on the inherent “lag” between any social change based on science and its reflection in law and religion, pointing out that birth control was at that time “condemned” in both.¹⁷

The year after “New Woman” was published, the Hollingworths used their joint sabbaticals to take a long-awaited trip to Europe--their first alone together. In his memoirs, Harry Hollingworth claimed that at this point in their lives, they no longer needed the “early morning slogan about the ‘pants.’”¹⁸ His wife had been promoted to Assistant Professor, he had been promoted to full Professor and elected president of the American Psychological Association, and each of them was a published author. These were heady days:

The freedom that we had long wanted, to forget the little dabs of income and the deficits on the budget, was upon us. We were ready for two great consummations. One of these, we were shortly to be informed, was to be forever denied us. The other was ours to command, so that we launched with full energy again into our professional work.¹⁹

This passage is the only extant evidence that their childlessness may have been other than

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., 19.

¹⁷Ibid., 20.

¹⁸Hollingworth, “Years at Columbia,” 217.

¹⁹Ibid., 218.

a deliberate choice. If the “great consummation” to be “forever denied” them was in fact parenthood, it may be that they simply waited too long--Leta Hollingworth was forty-two years old by this time.

However, there is compelling evidence that the Hollingworths decided against having children. Leta Hollingworth had lost her own mother to childbirth and it is likely that Harry Hollingworth's mother died in the same manner. More than one of her works mentioned the mortality rate associated with childbirth. Leta Hollingworth was also the victim of a severely dysfunctional family--an irresponsible father, a relentlessly harsh stepmother, an uncle who was an alcoholic, and another uncle (or possibly aunt) who had murdered his own children. Her fear of childbirth, her dysfunctional family, and her highly satisfying career may have convinced her that motherhood was not for her. It is also worth noting that the ideal marriage portrayed by undergraduate Leta Stetter in “The Clerk” twenty-five years earlier was a childless one of fifteen years' duration.

Harry Hollingworth's writings lend credence to this theory. If a doctor had told them that they could not have children, it is odd that Harry Hollingworth's autobiographies give no indication that he and his wife were emotionally affected by this news. Moreover, he was evasive in his choice of the phrase “great consummation” to mean “having children.” This evasiveness is in sharp contrast to his straightforward manner throughout most of his two autobiographies. Rosenberg has also pointed out the peculiarity in his not having mentioned the absence of children in his biography of his wife.²⁰

²⁰Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres*, 86.

Hollingworth seems to have been “covering up” for something related to the issue of children, most likely the couple’s decision to avoid parenthood. He openly communicated their deliberate “postponement” of having children earlier in their lives, when poverty and the need to establish their careers were of paramount importance. But once they had overcome these hurdles, he evidently thought their rejection of parenthood was something of an embarrassment.

More than one scholar has speculated that the cancer that killed Leta Hollingworth at age fifty-three was responsible for her inability to have children at age forty-two. While it seems highly unlikely that she could have survived eleven years with untreated cancer,²¹ an even more compelling refutation of this theory can again be found in Harry Hollingworth’s autobiographies. Tormented by the question of whether she had advance knowledge of the cancer that killed her, he cited numerous pieces of evidence that she was indeed aware of her condition. However, he does not make any connection between the cancer and her inability to have children. Given how easily contemporary scholars have leapt to this conclusion, Hollingworth would have undoubtedly reached it too, were it not for his knowledge that their lack of children had nothing to do with physical inability.

Regardless, after she finished “New Woman,” Leta Hollingworth never again pub-

²¹Presbyterian Medical Center’s log books indicate that the medical records covering Leta Hollingworth’s final three weeks of life have been destroyed. The New York City Municipal Archives, which would have a copy of the medical report written in conjunction with the death certificate, will release such reports only on the grounds of medical need of a family member. The death certificate itself, available from the Bureau of Records in the Manhattan Department of Health, does not give any information as to cause of death, other than that it was a natural death due to reasons other than communicable disease.

lished any works on the topic of women and reproduction; her writing focused almost exclusively on gifted children for the remainder of her career. Perhaps her decline in interest was the result of her own sadness on learning that she could never be a mother. More probably, it resulted from a sense of relief that the “Woman Question” had finally been eliminated in her own life.

Chapter Nine

The Dashed Hope for “Forty Years Together”

Leta and Harry Hollingworth had often talked fondly of their prospective “forty years together,”¹ but this was not to be the case. In October 1939, Leta Hollingworth became seriously ill yet refused to seek medical treatment. Instead, she obtained a leave of absence from Teachers College and made plans to go away with a long-time friend of hers “for a long rest, with no human contacts.”² Her friend’s inability to make the trip, along with pleas from her husband, finally caused her to relent and allow a doctor to examine her.³ An immediate exploratory surgery was deemed necessary, for which she was carried by ambulance the forty miles from their country home to Presbyterian Medical Center in New York City.⁴ Within a few hours, she was diagnosed as suffering from advanced abdominal cancer, for which no surgery or treatment was possible. She never left the hospital, dying there three weeks later on 27 November 1939, with her husband standing at the foot of her bed.⁵

Harry Hollingworth claimed that her death “came as a shock to all who knew

¹Hollingworth, “Years at Columbia,” 256.

²Leta Stetter Hollingworth; quoted in Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth*, 149.

³Ibid., 149-50.

⁴Hollingworth, “Years at Columbia,” 264.

⁵Ibid., Postscript #6, 1.

her,”⁶ yet the evidence that Leta Hollingworth had known of her cancer well in advance of the end is overwhelming. In a “homecoming” letter requested by the editor of the *Lincoln Journal and Star* late in 1937, she attempted to compensate for an overly morbid closing paragraph with a glib denial:

Only one more thing I would say. Sometime I shall come back to Nebraska for good. I was born there. I was reared there. I was educated there. I shall take the last long sleep there. The east is too alien for purposes of eternal sleep. But of course that’s a long way off, for I have only lived half a century, so far.⁷

During the Hollingworths’ visit to Lincoln to receive honorary doctorates from the University of Nebraska the next year, Leta Hollingworth insisted on purchasing gravesites for the two of them at Wyuka Cemetery, a short distance outside the capital.⁸ Then in 1939, she began revising a manuscript she had begun in 1924, entitled “Children Above 180 IQ (Stanford Binet).”⁹ This work surveyed the published material in the field and included accounts of high IQ case studies she had made. In the preface to this book, Hollingworth again hinted at her own impending death:

The most interesting part of this research is yet to come, in the form of a record of the mature performances of these gifted persons observed in childhood. However,

⁶Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth*, 149.

⁷Leta Hollingworth, New York City, to the Editor of *Lincoln (Nebraska) Journal and Star*, 3 December 1937, in “Nebraskans of Other Days Send Their Season’s Greetings,” *Lincoln Sunday Journal and Star*, 26 December 1937, sec. C-D, p. 11.

⁸Hollingworth, “Years at Columbia,” 258.

⁹Harry L. Hollingworth, foreword to *Children Above 180 IQ Stanford-Binet: Origin and Development*, by Leta S. Hollingworth (Yonkers-on-Hudson, New York: World Book Company, 1942), iii.

I propose to make a report now of origin and development; to be followed, if I live so long, by further reports of adult status. Such researches require more than the life span of one investigator, since time is of the essence of the task. Universities should make provision for institutional prosecution of these long-time studies as distinguished from individual prosecution. In any case, I shall try to leave the records to some younger student who will comprehend them, and who will amplify them if I prove unable to do so myself.¹⁰

During this last year of her life, Hollingworth also wrote out informal contracts for those who were depending on her financial support in order to obtain their education. These contracts stipulated that in the event of her death, her estate should be charged with the remainder of such obligations.¹¹

Ten years before her death, Hollingworth had voluntarily sought a thorough medical examination, at which time a tumor was discovered. After seeking the advice of experts, she informed her husband that their advice was to leave the tumor alone, since it was non-malignant in nature. However, from that point until her final illness, she steadfastly refused to be seen by a doctor, even at Harry Hollingworth's urging.¹² The doctors who treated her at Presbyterian Medical Center during the final weeks of her life were convinced that the cancer had been diagnosed during the physical examination ten years earlier, and that she had deliberately chosen what Americans in the latter years of the

¹⁰Leta S. Hollingworth, *Children Above 180 IQ*, xiii.

¹¹Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth*, 147.

¹²*Ibid.*, 149.

twentieth century refer to as “quality over quantity” with respect to her remaining years of life.¹³

The realization that his wife must have known of her condition for years without sharing that knowledge with him tortured Harry Hollingworth for the rest of his life. In the first few days after her death, in a desperate search for confirmation, he realized that she had spent more time than usual reading books of poetry during her last year. Upon examination of these volumes, he found several poems circled in bright red; all that were marked in such a way dealt with either love or death.¹⁴ Yet, despite these poems, despite the logic of the theory put forth by the doctors who treated her during her illness, and despite his admittance that his wife was “thoroughly capable” of keeping such a grim secret for ten long years,¹⁵ Harry Hollingworth refused to acknowledge that this was definitely the case.

Harry Hollingworth spent most of his time during the first five years after Leta Hollingworth’s death trying to deal with his grief. After her funeral at the little Wyuka Cemetery chapel in Lincoln, he returned to his teaching at Barnard. He set up her former assistant in their apartment in the city, employing him to help sort through all of her materials from her office and Speyer School, where she had been in the middle of a five-year experimental project in the education of gifted children. Meanwhile, Hollingworth had the “sad task” of disposing of his wife’s personal effects at Hollywyck, their country

¹³Ibid., 150.

¹⁴Ibid., 151.

¹⁵Ibid.

estate. He claimed that: "Everywhere I looked for some message or memorandum from her, showing how well she understood what was happening to her in the last years of her life. Nothing of this character was ever revealed."¹⁶

To help him work through his grief, Harry Hollingworth began several complex projects, all with the aim of keeping alive the memory of his late wife. As early as the spring of 1940, he decided to publish privately a collection of her poems. Only a few hundred copies of *Prairie Years* were printed, for distribution to those people Hollingworth knew would value them; none were allowed to be sold. That same year, he oversaw the private publication of another volume entitled *Public Addresses of Leta S. Hollingworth*. Both of these volumes were exhibited for the first time at a 1940 conference organized by Teachers College in honor of Leta Hollingworth; Harry Hollingworth wrote the introduction to the accompanying special issue of the *Teachers College Record*.¹⁷ He even found time during this first year after her death to return to Nebraska, in order "to be near her, to visit our old haunts,"¹⁸ and to deliver the Memorial Day address for the people of his hometown of De Witt. During this first year after Leta Hollingworth's death, Harry Hollingworth also began channeling his grief into the writing of his memoirs.

By early 1941, Hollingworth and Josefine Weischer, the housekeeper employed by the Hollingworths since 1924, "became friends rather than employer and employee, and

¹⁶Hollingworth, "Years at Columbia," Postscript #2, 6.

¹⁷Ibid., Postscript #2, 7.

¹⁸Ibid., Postscript #2, 9.

agreed to remain together, getting what satisfactions we could out of the few years yet before us.”¹⁹ One of their first decisions as a couple was to leave Hollywyck for a small cottage, which the Hollingworths had owned for a number of years. Harry Hollingworth put the deed to this property in Weischer’s name to give her a permanent home and resources lest anything happen to him. Despite this new union, Hollingworth’s grieving for his dead wife continued largely unabated. Before renovations to the cottage had begun, Hollingworth and Weischer made a cross-country road trip to accompany his visiting niece back to her home in California, stopping off at Lincoln to visit again the grave of Leta Hollingworth.²⁰

The 1941-1942 academic year was to have been another sabbatical year for the Hollingworths, tentatively to the Scandinavian countries. In his memoirs of this period, Harry Hollingworth again pondered the question of his wife’s advance knowledge of the cancer that took her life:

. . . L- was especially enthusiastic over this proposal [to travel to the Scandinavian countries for their sabbaticals]. It seems to me since that at least some of this enthusiasm must have been spurious,-calculated to conceal her secret knowledge that she would probably not be there when the time came. But perhaps I am wrong there.²¹

Instead of the planned European trip, Hollingworth used the sabbatical to reorganize his lengthy memoirs into three volumes--a biography of his wife, a volume covering his early

¹⁹Ibid., Postscript #2, 10.

²⁰Ibid., Postscript #2, 11.

²¹Ibid., Postscript #2, 10.

life in Nebraska, and another on their life together in New York.²² In addition, he completed Leta Hollingworth's book manuscript on "Children Above 180 IQ (Stanford Binet)," which was published with her listed as sole author in 1942.²³ He was unable to find a commercial publisher interested in the biography of his wife; even Columbia University Press "thought it too much of a memorial volume for them to publish."²⁴ However, the University of Nebraska Press printed four hundred copies of the book, with Harry Hollingworth paying the publishing costs, as he had done earlier for the volume of Leta Hollingworth's poetry and the collection of her public addresses.²⁵

In 1944, Hollingworth found yet another way to pay homage to his wife's memory; working with the trustees of Columbia University, he established the Leta Stetter Hollingworth Fellowship. The fellowship was endowed with a donation from Hollingworth of \$51,000, which represented about a third of his financial worth at the time. The income from this fund was to be paid to Josefine Weischer during her lifetime and then to Hollingworth if he survived her.²⁶ Once they were both dead, the interest earned each year was to be used to provide a year of graduate work at Columbia for "a young woman from the University of Nebraska who is judged by the faculty of that institution to be

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., Postscript #2, 12-13.

²⁴Ibid., Postscript #2, 13.

²⁵Ibid., Postscript #2, 7, 13.

²⁶Ibid., Postscript #2, 17.

'most likely to emulate the character and career of Leta Stetter Hollingworth.'"²⁷ Hollingworth wrote in his memoirs that he could think of "no more appropriate way in which to leave a monument to all the things she meant to me during her lifetime."²⁸

By the end of the first five-year period following Leta Hollingworth's death, her husband's efforts to honor her had been monumental. Her poetry, public addresses, biography, and unfinished "pet project" had all been published. A fellowship had been established in her name at Columbia University, and two volumes of Harry Hollingworth's memoirs, each of which contained no small amount of material on Leta Hollingworth, had been written. Yet Hollingworth had failed to get over her death: "Emotionally I died five years ago; intellectually I have been expediting my demise during the past three years."²⁹ His second postscript to the "Years at Columbia" manuscript, written to coincide with the fifth anniversary of Leta Hollingworth's death in November 1944, painted a picture of a seriously depressed individual. Acknowledging that his attitude had become what some might call morbid, Hollingworth claimed: "I have been steadfastly looking forward to my own death, anticipating it, picturing it, and as it were, dieing [*sic*] in advance. . . . Probable and possible modes of departure have been canvassed and some of their prerequisites made readily available in case they should appear expedient."³⁰

²⁷Ibid., Postscript #2, 18.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., Postscript #2, 20.

³⁰Ibid.

But Hollingworth never carried through with this dire threat. In 1946, he took two major steps which led to a simpler yet happy life. First, Josefine Weischer and he realized that "our life together, which was running smoothly and happily, would be simplified if we should be married," and so they were.³¹ Hollingworth reveled in the fact that "the lonely old widower has become the patriarchal member of a family," referring to Josefine Weischer's daughter, son-in-law and grandchild.³² Later that year, he retired from Barnard at the age of sixty-six.³³ Yet his first wife was hardly forgotten. His third postscript to "Years of Columbia," written in 1949, opened with the acknowledgment that the tenth anniversary of her death was upon him. Furthermore, it was a year they had hoped to reach as a couple: "This year would have marked the end of that 'forty years', but in the last quarter of that stretch we have been together only in my memory."³⁴

Harry Hollingworth's last extant words about Leta Hollingworth are in the 1954 postscript to his memoirs. The fifteen years that had elapsed since her death finally enabled him to tell the details of that death, albeit with his usual dose of morbidity: "Fifteen years ago tomorrow occurred the calamity responsible for these several volumes of scribbled memoirs. To be precise, on Nov. 28, 1939, at 6:05 P.M. in Harkness Pavilion I

³¹Ibid., Postscript #3, 10.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., Postscript #3, 8.

³⁴Ibid., Postscript #3, 1.

saw and heard L.S.H. draw her last breath. . . .”³⁵ Hollingworth did not live to write the postscript describing the fourth five-year period; he died on 17 September 1956 at the age of seventy-six. But he saw to it that Leta Hollingworth and he took “the final sleep” together;³⁶ he was buried next to her under a large oak tree in Wyuka Cemetery, now surrounded on all sides by the small city that Lincoln, Nebraska has become in the ninety-plus years since Leta Stetter and Harry Hollingworth first took their pledge there to “forty years together.”

³⁵Ibid., Postscript #6, 1.

³⁶The first article of Harry L. Hollingworth’s will declared: “I direct that I be buried, or that my ashes be buried, beside the grave of my first wife, Leta Stetter Hollingworth, in Wyuka Cemetery, Lincoln Nebraska, in the grave already designated by my name on a stone monument marking our two graves. . . .” This will was probated in Westchester County (New York) Surrogate’s Court. File #847-18163.

Chapter Ten

Conclusion

The significance of the work of any individual from the past can perhaps best be judged by a jury of that individual's peers, both their contemporaries and their modern-day counterparts. Fortunately, this sort of analysis can easily be made in the case of Leta S. Hollingworth because she was honored with memorial conferences in her name on the occasions of both the first and fiftieth anniversaries of her death.

The first of these two commemorations was a two-day Conference on the Education of the Gifted held in December 1940 by Columbia University Teachers College. On the occasion of this conference, the President of the American Psychological Association claimed of Hollingworth that "in her death psychology has lost one who might well be called America's most distinguished *woman* [emphasis added] psychologist."¹ His choice of words is quite ironical considering that Hollingworth had spent much of her life trying to overcome psychologists' belief in sex-based differences. She would have undoubtedly preferred to have him refer to her as "*one* of America's most distinguished psychologists." As its title indicated, this conference was devoted exclusively to the field of research involving the intellectually gifted. The only reference to women in the conference proceedings related to gifted woman, those 250,000 or so American women between thirty

¹Quoted by Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth*, 156.

and sixty years of age, many of whom were doing "the drudgery work in the civic life of the community."²

Hollingworth's professional endeavors in other fields fared better in the December 1940 issue of the *Teachers College Record*, which was devoted solely to her work. Entitled "Education and the Individual--In Honor of Leta S. Hollingworth," it contained summaries of her work in six different areas: the psychology of women; the study of mental deficiency; clinical psychology; psychology of the adolescent; education of the intellectually gifted; and the study of special abilities and disabilities. In the article covering Hollingworth's early research into the psychology of women, educator Katharine B. Greene was unstinting with her praise: "Into a period when experimental material was used uncritically to bolster the assumptions of man's innate superiority, Professor Leta S. Hollingworth projected her clear thinking and scientific analyses of data. Her consequent good experimental procedure as well as her deft handling of facts have made this muzziness of concept in the field of sex differences as outmoded as the concepts of phrenologists."³ Greene went on to term Hollingworth's doctoral research on functional periodicity "a classic."⁴

In May 1989, a three-day Hollingworth Conference entitled "The Legacy of Leta

²"Some Issues and Problems Raised by the Conference on Education for the Gifted," *Teachers College Record* 43 (February 1941): 441.

³Katharine B. Greene, "The Social and Professional Status of Women," *Teachers College Record* 42 (December 1940): 207.

⁴*Ibid.*, 210.

Hollingworth: Contributions to Psychology and Gifted Education"--was held at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. The papers from this Conference were published a few months later in the *Roeper Review--A Journal on Gifted Education*. As with the 1940 Conference, these papers focused almost exclusively on Hollingworth's work with the gifted. However, the topic receiving the next most emphasis was her research into the psychology of women. Academician Rhoda Miller claimed that "by using her impeccable research skills," Hollingworth had "singlehandedly undermined the sanctity of the belief in female inferiority."⁵ Miller viewed Hollingworth's investigations as "instrumental in stimulating research on the social forces that resulted in the inferior status of women."⁶ Another psychology academician, Ludy T. Benjamin, Jr., acknowledged that: "The boundaries that she battled in the search for the equality of opportunity for women . . . are still boundaries today. However, they are far less formidable in contemporary society, a fact that is in some measure due to Leta S. Hollingworth."⁷

In November 1989, Teachers College held a one-day conference on "Women in Leadership." The planning committee "had no trouble selecting Leta Hollingworth" as one of a small number of subjects for a session entitled "Women in Leadership at Teachers

⁵Rhoda Miller, "Leta Stetter Hollingworth: Pioneer Woman of Psychology," *Roeper Review: A Journal on Gifted Education* 12 (March 1990): 144.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ludy T. Benjamin, Jr., "Leta Stetter Hollingworth: Psychologist, Educator, Feminist," *Roeper Review: A Journal on Gifted Education* 12 (March 1990): 150.

College.”⁸ Professor of Education A. Harry Passow, who made the presentation on Hollingworth, termed her “a pioneer and a leader in the psychology of women and the study of gender” who was “deservedly described as ‘the scientific bulwark’ of the women’s movement.”⁹

Another psychologist writing in 1989 said of Hollingworth: “Into this milieu was born a poor Nebraska farmgirl who would challenge them all . . . and win the battle. One young American woman was responsible for women gaining intellectual equity in the eyes of science. One woman took it as her mission to prove that women were as gifted as men and that the differences in their achievement were due to differences in *opportunity* rather than in ability or character.”¹⁰

Rosenberg claims that by 1920, Leta Hollingworth and other American psychologists had “buried the doctrine of female uniqueness.” Several factors were responsible for this. Coeducation through the university level was becoming accepted and the first women were just beginning to receive doctorates in psychology. As a result, girls were present in schools in large numbers when intelligence tests were first being administered; women psychologists amplified the egalitarian ramifications of the data obtained from these tests. The insistence on the part of women psychologists that their male peers live

⁸A. Harry Passow, “Leta Stetter Hollingworth: A Real Original,” *Roeper Review: A Journal on Gifted Education* 12 (March 1990): 134.

⁹*Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁰Linda Kreger Silverman, “It All Began with Leta Hollingworth: The Story of Giftedness in Women,” *Journal for the Education of the Gifted* 12 (1989): 87.

up to their own critical ideals when studying sex differences also had an impact.¹¹

Clearly, in the views of both her contemporary and modern-day peers, Leta Stetter Hollingworth made a significant contribution to women's fight for equality. It is regrettable that her early keen interest in research and writing about women completely disappeared within fifteen years after her first work in this area. Furthermore, it is not clear that any younger women were inspired by her to carry on this work: none of the twenty-nine Ph.D. dissertations (twenty-three of which were written by women) that she oversaw during her academic career involved the psychology of women. A generation had passed before psychologists Eleanor Maccoby and Lois Meek Stolz furthered Hollingworth's research in the psychology of women, with their exploration of women's supposed peculiar suitability for motherhood.¹² Moreover, Hollingworth's devotion in later years to the cause of the small minority of intellectually gifted individuals within society seems somewhat trivial by comparison with her earlier efforts on behalf of the entire female half of the population.

Leta Hollingworth's later years were marked not only by an absence of feminist work but also by one noticeable reversal from an earlier stance. In 1936, the Columbia University newspaper published her proposal that an experiment be conducted relating to the award of scholarships. Half of the funds were to be awarded in the traditional manner and the other half were to be distributed only to those individuals who exhibited "rare abil-

¹¹Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres*, 107.

¹²Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres*, 238-39.

ity.” One of the eight rules for conducting this proposed experiment stated: “There would be incumbents of both sexes, but since there is presumptive evidence that girls are less likely to continue for a lifetime in intellectual endeavor, a majority of those selected would be boys.”¹³ This proposal is quite similar in intent to the one made twenty years earlier by the leaders of Phi Beta Kappa, with respect to limiting female membership, a proposal Hollingworth had openly and severely criticized. It is difficult to reconcile the blatant sexual discrimination inherent in Hollingworth’s scholarship proposal with the feminism that she exhibited from her high school days through the Phi Beta Kappa crisis and into her early forties. Possibly, her overriding interest in gifted children simply outweighed her feminism at this point in her life. What is more likely is that she had become severely disillusioned that women would ever break out of their biological “cages” as a result of the decline in feminism by the late 1930s.

Harry Hollingworth spent his entire career on the faculty of Barnard College, a fact which bespeaks much of his own feminist views. Because of the many connections among Columbia College, Columbia University’s Graduate School, Teachers College, and Barnard College, he had male as well as female pupils throughout his thirty-eight years on the Barnard faculty. However, he claimed that his “pleasantest [*sic*] relations, as a teacher” were with “my own Barnard students.”¹⁴ He found these students to be “a choice selection of able and on the whole thoughtful young women,” with the senior psychology

¹³Leta S. Hollingworth, “Some Suggestions on Scholarships,” *Independent Journal of Columbia University*, 4 December 1936, 4.

¹⁴Hollingworth, “Years at Columbia,” 249.

majors “well able to hold their own with graduate students from whatever source.”¹⁵

Rosenberg has posited that Hollingworth’s feminist influence at Barnard increased with the advent of World War I. James McKeen Cattell was fired from his position as head of Columbia University’s psychology department as a result of his anti-war activism, thereby freeing faculty members such as Hollingworth from his anti-feminist leadership.¹⁶

However, perhaps Harry Hollingworth’s greatest contribution to the cause of womankind was simply his willingness to allow the very intelligent and capable woman he married to reach her full potential, unhindered by tradition. Nobody understood the importance of this better than Leta Stetter Hollingworth herself:

Fortunately for me, I married a Western man, who wanted me to go ahead and make all I possibly could out of my life, and who did not wish to restrain me in any way within my “proper sphere” (“the home”.) So I have been more fortunate than most women.¹⁷

Much more fortunate indeed.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres*, 214.

¹⁷Leta Hollingworth, New York City, to Emma Fischer, Valentine, Nebraska, 5 March 1917, LS (photocopy) provided by Kathleen Rutledge.

Chapter Eleven

Essay on Sources

The biography, the book of poetry, the collection of public addresses, the completion of the textbook on children with high IQs, the fellowship in her name—none of these remarkable undertakings on the part of the bereaved Harry Hollingworth begin to compensate for his most egregious act: he evidently destroyed the papers of Leta Hollingworth after her death. In his biography of her, Hollingworth claimed that Leta Hollingworth had written “at least a thousand letters a year for a period of thirty years,” “several hundred” of which were addressed to him.¹ He made liberal use of the latter in the biography, nevertheless conceding that he had omitted “all the more personal features, and all comments on our own relationships.”² While he never explained his motivation for destroying these letters, he was fairly clear about having done so: “It is in some respects a pity that the world at large could not be admitted more freely to the letters and other personal communications of Leta Stetter Hollingworth. . . . But no further exhibition of her letters shall be made.”³ He reiterated this theme in the final paragraph of the biography: “She was my college sweetheart, and then for thirty-one years my wife, but this half of the story shall remain our secret.”⁴

¹Hollingworth, *Leta Stetter Hollingworth*, 4.

²*Ibid.*

³*Ibid.*

⁴*Ibid.*, 158.

Even in the absence of correspondence with her husband, a rich archival collection could have been created from the other material left in the wake of Leta Hollingworth's death:

The great amount of records, memoranda, letters, keepsakes, souvenirs, photographs, reprints, clippings, and personal equipment that she left behind her exhibited no classifications to guide strange hands that undertook to deal with them. Although it required several rooms to accommodate these things, every item seemed to have for her its psychological or chronological spot.

She apparently preserved all the letters she had received through a third of a century of active correspondence, with carbons of her replies in the case of many professional communications.⁵

Yet none of these materials were retained either.

In addition, for many years Leta Hollingworth had planned a volume to be entitled *Mrs. Pilgrim's Progress*. Towards that end, she had saved many clippings and other material, and outlined part of the planned contents. Although these materials would have had nothing to do with the Hollingworths' personal relationship, they too were evidently discarded by her husband: "This project was left incomplete, and it can never be finished by another hand."⁶

Harry Hollingworth did donate a small amount of Leta Hollingworth's papers to the Nebraska State Historical Society in 1942.⁷ This material consists primarily of published works and typed manuscripts of articles that had been published. Just a few months after Harry Hollingworth's death, his second wife also died. Harry Hollingworth's

⁵Ibid., 148.

⁶Ibid., 91.

⁷"Gifts to the Society," *Nebraska History* 23 (January-March 1942): 97.

belongings then passed into the hands of Virginia Weischer Florence and Benjamin H. Florence, his step-daughter and her husband. Ten years later, the Archives of the History of American Psychology at the University of Akron, Ohio, successfully sought to obtain those Hollingworth papers remaining in the possession of the Florences. This collection is far more extensive than that of the Nebraska State Historical Society, but again contains very little unpublished material and no correspondence of a personal nature. The Nebraska State Historical Society and the Archives of the History of American Psychology both contain versions of "Born in Nebraska" and "Years at Columbia." These autobiographies by Harry Hollingworth are the best single unpublished source of material on the life of Leta Stetter Hollingworth.

Neither Virginia Weischer Florence nor Benjamin Florence, both of whom are alive at the time of this writing, have any idea what Harry Hollingworth did with the papers belonging to Leta Hollingworth, nor any understanding of why he would have destroyed them. On the surface, the destruction of Leta Hollingworth's papers seems inexplicable given Harry Hollingworth's academic background and his many efforts to keep his wife's memory alive in the years immediately after her death. One possible explanation lies in his prolonged bewilderment over the question of whether Leta Hollingworth had known of her fatal malady. Losing her suddenly was devastating to Hollingworth. He had believed that "although there were no children to provide such unifying threads as these may sometimes bring . . . our two lives were as closely integrated as the frailties of human nature make possible."⁸ Accepting that their intimacy did not extend to

⁸Hollingworth, "Years at Columbia," 254.

something so profound as her impending death was a blow from which he barely recovered. Seen in this light, his destruction of her papers is easier to understand. For the intimacy that Leta Stetter Hollingworth had denied him made her husband all the more anxious to preserve for himself that intimacy which they *had* shared.

Few marriages are perfect. A union in which one member deliberately withholds the knowledge of illness and impending death, as Leta Stetter Hollingworth almost certainly did, is indeed an imperfect one. Unfortunately, Harry Hollingworth's reaction makes it virtually impossible for historians and psychologists of the latter half of the twentieth century to know Leta Stetter Hollingworth in the manner in which "Born in Nebraska" and "Years at Columbia" make it easy to know Harry Levi Hollingworth. Donating her papers to an established archive would have constituted a far more effective method of honoring the memory of Leta Hollingworth than all the efforts undertaken by Harry Hollingworth combined.

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