

In 1914, the society section of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch wrote that “Regardless of nationality, the young girl rushes along the crest of the wave, absorbing American life, not only through her mind, but through the very pores in her skin.” In my doctoral work, I want to characterize and explain how Italian-, Greek-, and Russian Jewish-American women “absorbed American life” while tethered to ethnicity, both in their own self-understanding and white Protestant perception. While most scholarship focuses on immigrant women’s place in the culture of capitalism or the domestic sphere, I want to focus on young women’s presence in public space, opening up a broader question: how did old-world obligation and new American life affect female choice?

At the graduate level, I intend to explore this question vis-a-vis involvement in sexuality, fashion, beauty, food desire, and social movements, focusing on twentieth-century urban America. Multiplicity of identity, I would suggest, was critical in both women’s participation and the reactions they received. Women were constrained by expectations and dictations of acceptability based on their ethnicities, gender and sexual identity, religion, and class. For Russian-Jewish women, this multiplicity was more complex, because of their nationality as Russian and ethno-religious identity as Jewish. Expectations in the domestic and familial sphere further impacted female choice; though I do not intend to focus on the history of the family, I seek to explore the role these expectations played in informing female presence in public space. I also hope to draw transnational comparisons between second-generation women and their counterparts in their homelands. Though I remain apprehensive about committing myself to a topic so early, I plan to use these questions as starting points in a future dissertation.

This project is significant for several reasons. Following the avenues of scholarship done by historians such as Diner and Gabaccia, I want to frame immigrant narratives from a cultural perspective. By employing the intersectional framework increasingly demanded by feminist historiography and shifting my focus to a different generation of women, I hope to add to their work by fostering discussions of generational differences and acculturation. Exploring the second-generation of immigrant women is conducive to conversations on how anti-immigrant legislation and sentiment affected the way that these women interacted with immigrant communities and society as a whole. Further, my work seeks to add a more humanizing

dimension to immigrant history, placing women beyond their normal representations as laborers or consumers.

The cultural and social implications of immigrant identity first became of interest to me as an undergraduate. During my fourth year, I opted to write an honors thesis, titled “*Paesani on the Hill: Keeping Italian in St. Louis, 1900-1990*,” which centers around how Italian immigrants in St. Louis maintained a cohesive ethnic and cultural identity. Galvanized by my academic year in Rome, this project was inspired by a desire to explain how Italian-American culture became so far-removed from that of the motherland. In addition to affirming my passion for modern global history, writing a thesis also gave me practical research experience. Believing that the history of a community is best told in part through its own words, I collected and relied on oral histories. My work was supplemented by my navigation through a sea of raw data and esoteric records. This research, as well as my independent readings and women and gender studies coursework, led to a desire to situate the narratives of immigrant women in a broader historical context.

My desire to study at the graduate level stems primarily from my intellectual and professional goals. Intellectually, I aim to contribute to the scholarship surrounding gender, race, and transnationalism by exploring the history of ethnically-othered women and placing them in a context other than economic and domestic spaces. Outside of research, graduate study will allow me to further develop my research and critical analysis skills, and the interdisciplinary nature of a graduate program will deepen my understanding of cultural and social issues surrounding my research interests and practices. In terms of a profession, I intend to become a professor. In addition to the research experience, the mission of graduate programs to train well-rounded academics and the option of a teaching assistantship will give me experience necessary for my future career. On a more personal level, I enjoy the study of history and want to continue at the level demanded by a PhD program.

The SOP is an opportunity for you to make an argument about “fit.” The admissions committee won’t do the work for you; you need to explain how you will contribute to the intellectual life of the school and your discipline and, in turn, why THAT university is the best place for you to do that work. In the body of the SOP, name the advisors (yes, plural) you are interested in whose subject and/or methodology are aligned with your research (see below). Additionally, what resources does the university offer to support your research (specific library collections, cultural institutions in the city, research centers, interdisciplinary opportunities)? It can help here to use language from the department website. How does that school distinguish itself from its peer institutions? Guess what, that’s why you want to go there too! (thanks to [u/Euax](#) for this paragraph)

UC Berkeley's history program looms large in my mind, largely because of its outstanding faculty and interdisciplinary approach to history. In my own quest for a suitable graduate program, I was thrilled to learn that Professors Thomas Laqueur and Carla Hesse both taught at Berkeley. Professor Laqueur's book, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, stands out among the many books I read during my undergraduate education; and I credit his book with introducing me to the nascent but fascinating field of the history of sexuality and the body. Together, Professor Laqueur's cutting edge research and Professor Hesse's knowledge of early modern women's history would make my experience at Berkeley a challenging and enjoyable one.

In addition, Berkeley provides an ideal climate for me to develop my cross-disciplinary interests. In particular, I am interested in pursuing a designated emphasis in women, gender, and sexuality, a unique option that distinguishes Berkeley's history program from that of other institutions. The cross-disciplinary nature of Berkeley's graduate program would foster, I hope, fruitful discussions with other departments, notably the department of English and Women's Studies, thus broadening and enriching my research as well as my general understanding early modern culture and history.

On a more basic level, writing a thesis gave me the chance to become better acquainted with the essentials of historical research. Suspecting that normative discourses in early modern England participated aggressively in the monitoring of women's appetites, I navigated the sea of early English printed sources in pursuit of the slightest mention of food and diet. Those sources I encountered during my research, which ranged from the popular conduct book, *The Education of a Christian Woman* by Juan Luis Vives, to the anonymous sex manual, *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, challenged my basic understanding of history and the original premise of my thesis in ways not anticipated. From deciphering esoteric type-fonts to developing an awareness of the importance of time and funds, I experienced the mundane realities of research that inevitably stunt the historian's aspirations. Even more important was my gradual acceptance of the fact that early modern sources, no matter how we read them, do not always accommodate modern biases and expectations.