Church History 80:1 (March 2011), 40–75.

doi:10.1017/S0009640710001599

Drunkards, Fornicators, and a Great Hen Squabble: Censure Practices and the Gendering of Puritanism

Monica D. Fitzgerald

The chamber pot was still full. The Dewy family's servant had not yet completed her morning chore of emptying the chamber pot when she dumped it over the head of their next door neighbor, Goody Ingerson. The unexpected assault was retaliation for the murder of some of the Dewys' hens. In 1714, the Dewys owned over 120 chickens, and as their closest neighbor, Ingerson grew tired of the fowl running freely through the Ingersons' property. The Ingersons chased those chickens out of their garden, barn, barley field, and scurried the unwanted guests out of their house. So, to show her unhappiness, Goodwife Ingerson wrung a few necks. The contents of the chamber pot did not slow her down, as Ingerson sent her daughter home with two more dead hens. Tensions escalated and a small brawl almost erupted when Abigail Dewy ordered her chamber pot wielding servant to apprehend the young girl escaping with the dead poultry. The Ingersons' daughter escaped the servant's clutches before Dewy could mete out a flogging with her whipping cord. The Ingersons' daughter made it home safely (perhaps to a chicken dinner). The case of the great hen squabble went to court, where the Connecticut magistrates ordered the Ingersons to pay for the dead chickens. However, when the court asked Abigail Dewy if she ordered her servant to drag Ingerson's daughter by the hair to the Dewy house, she lied and said no. For that, the Westfield church censured her for the sin of lying.[1]

Abigail's father-in-law, Thomas Dewy, had faced censure charges a generation earlier, in 1683. Slow to repair his mill after a storm destroyed it, Dewy was upset when neighbors started building their own mill upstream, diverting his water supply. Late one night, he tore down their dam and hid

[1]Edward Taylor, *Edward Taylor's "Church Records" and Related Sermons*, vol. 1, The Unpublished Writings of Edward Taylor, ed. Thomas M. Davis and Virginia L. Davis (Boston: Twayne, 1981), 237–41.

Monica D. Fitzgerald is Assistant Professor in the Liberal & Civic Studies Program at Saint Mary's College of California.

their tools. His congregation censured him for the destruction of property. The minister even delivered a sermon on the irregularity of such actions and the problems it caused to the community.[2]

Puritan disciplinary records such as the Dewys' offer a window into how Puritans reinforced their godly expectations for ordinary men and women. This has allowed historians to view their daily religious experiences and read the language they used to express their religious ideas and identities. Through their censure practices, Puritans created a gendered religious experience, emphasizing different aspects of Puritan doctrine for men and women, and censuring men and women for different types of sins. The gendering of Puritanism occurred as laymen reinterpreted Puritanism, focusing more on civic duty than piety for male sinners, while reinforcing women's internal spirituality. For their public confessions, laymen created a masculine version of Puritanism, while women upheld the ministerial mandates of a feminized religion. Church discipline became a vehicle to create different religious identities for men and women which created a gendered lived religion.

Historians now acknowledge that Puritans were not of one religious mind that emanated from the clergy, but understood religion in diverse ways that combined clerical and popular thinking.[3] David Hall describes a more flexible religious system, a "lived religion," wherein "the moral rules that the colonists practiced were, then, somewhat more eclectic than as outlined in any sermon or code of laws; and the enforcement of these rules was not authoritarian, but a matter of negotiation between different parties."[4] Building on Hall's concept of "lived religion," this article argues that men and women both experienced and constructed a gendered Puritanism. In the disciplinary process, they laity did not conform to clerical expectations, but developed practices which defined different religious roles and responsibilities for men and women.

Most churches in Massachusetts Bay followed similar standards for censuring their members in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In

[2]Taylor, *Church Records*, 183–85.

[3]See George Selement, *Keepers of the Vineyard: The Puritan Ministry and Collective Culture in Colonial New England* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984), 3. In his introduction Selement details that over one thousand pieces have been written about the Puritans since Perry Miller's seminal *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1939). Perry explained New England through the minds and ideas of its elite theologians. For examples of historians who examine the ordinary or marginalized, see David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989); Ruth Wallis Herndon, *Unwelcome Americans: Living in the Margins in Early New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

[4]David Hall, "Narrating Puritanism," in *New Directions in American Religious History*, ed. Harry S. Stout and D. G. Hart (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 70. This study examines how this "lived religion" was also gendered.

1644, John Cotton explained that church discipline represented the "key of order." Such a key "is the power whereby every member of the Church walketh orderly himself . . . and helpeth his brethren to walk orderly also."[5] In 1648, Puritan minister Thomas Hooker explained the necessity of church discipline: "[God] hath appointed Church-censures as good Physick, to purge out what is evill, as well as Word and Sacraments, which, like good diet, are sufficient to nourish the soul to eternal life." Hooker explained that church members must watch over one another, "each particular brother (appointed) as a skillful Apothecary, to help forward the spiritual health of all in confederacy with him."[6] Disciplinary practices helped ensure Puritans stayed on their godly paths.[7]

Ministers or elders could counsel someone for a private sin and frequently would privately meet with a sinner before taking public action. Sinners did not face their congregations for most private sins, which often dealt with impiety and struggles with faith. In no single censure case did a congregation charge a sinner with impiety. When Samuel Sewall wrote in his diary about his struggles over his "spiritual weakness and temptations," he met with his pastors, who encouraged him to pray. However, when Thomas Sargeant uttered "blasphemous" words about the Holy Ghost, he was publicly censured.[8] One man kept his struggles internal while the other expressed his outwardly.

Anyone in the community could accuse brethren or sisters of sinning, but only the male lay members could vote on a church censure. This practice created a space where lay*men* influenced church practices and patterns. Their ideas and expectations determined the censures and the confessor's behavior as well. While certainly not without influence, ministers could not formally direct the course of accusations, censures or confessions.[9] However, some ministers tried more than others to attempt to influence the process. Westfield's minister, Edward Taylor, frequently offered to help write confessions or instigate a censure case. He had varied results. While several congregants did use his written confessions, the congregation did not readily

[5]John Cotton, *The Keyes to the Kingdom of Heaven* (London: M. Simmons, 1644), B7.

[6]Thomas Hooker, *A Survey of the Summe of Church-Discipline* (London: Printed by A.M. for John Bellamy, 1648), 33.

[7]For further explanation, see Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd: A History of the New England Ministry in the Seventeenth Century* (Williamsburg, Va.: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 95–96.

[8]Samuel Sewall, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674–1729*, ed. M. Halsey Thomas (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1973), 35, 4.

[9]For a discussion of lay and ministerial power, see Nehemiah Adams, *The Autobiography of Thomas Shepard* (Boston: Pierce and Parker, 1832); Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd*; Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment*; Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America*; Selement, *Keepers of the Vineyard*; George Selement, "The Meeting of Elite and Popular Minds at Cambridge, New England, 1638–1645," *William and Mary Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (January 1984): 32–48.

accept Taylor's intrusions into disciplinary matters. In 1712, Brother Benjamin Smith petitioned to have his aging father-in-law legally placed under his care. Taylor sided against Smith, going so far as to write letters to the court at North Hampton. A frustrated Smith called for Taylor's letters to be read at a conference convened to address the matter. A fuming Taylor argued that he did not intend the letters to be read publicly. In his diary, he recorded that Smith had belittled him to the committee. Taylor tried to have Smith censured for "disobedience, provoking a minister, impenitency, false speaking, and threats." When his congregation refused to call a vote on Smith's alleged sins, Taylor threatened to suspend church services. In protest, he refused to administer the Lord's Supper during the entire seventeen-week ordeal. Five months after the case ended, Taylor preached two disciplinary sermons to his congregation. Although Taylor wanted Smith to repent, his congregation held the ultimate power of censure and did not honor their minister's strong demands.[10]

When the Charlestown congregation accused Mary Eades of fornication in 1698, her minister tried to compel her to confess. The minister was not successful and told the church about his efforts and "how obstinate and impenitent ye offender was" and decided to admonish her.[11] Ministers were certainly not without influence in censure cases, and tensions erupted from time to time, but their power was always tempered by the fact that officially the laity controlled the process. Popular ministers likely wielded more influence than others. However, in many congregations, lay elders had more longevity than ministers, who could be replaced or move to another town.

One of the most important voices a male church member had was his right and duty to vote in congregation matters. In 1681, the laity met to decide between two candidates for pastor, John Danforth of Roxbury or Reverend Jeremiah Cushing of Hingham. John Breck, although not a full member, felt strongly that he deserved a voice and placed his vote for minister. This caused quite a scene in the meetinghouse, with every member except Henry Leadbetter voting to expel him from the meeting. The next week, the elders announced that they had spoken with John Breck and he "was sorry yt he had acted soe as he did in yt manner & yt if any elce weer unsatisfied" they could talk to him directly.[12] The laity protected their voting rights and believed it was an important responsibility to their community and congregation.

[10]See Taylor, *Church Records*, 215–25.

[11]James Frothington Dunnwell, ed., *Records of the First Church in Charlestown, Massachusetts, 1632–1789* (Boston: David Clapp and Son, 1880), xii–xiii.

[12]Charles Hope, ed., *Records of the First Church of Dorchester, Massachusetts, 1636–1734*. (Boston: George H. Ellis, 1981), 85.

Famed minister John Cotton explained that the church put this power in the hands of the laity to prevent abuse of power by the clergy.[13] The laity had the right to reign in a minister who attempted to levy excessive influence in the disciplinary process. David Hall contends that such men used their lay power to admonish ministers who tried to exert too much authority.[14] Voting on censure cases meant that the laity held some power over their fellow church members. They had to determine the merits of an accusation, judge the sincerity of a confession, and mete out a judgment. In practice, censure cases usually included a consultation with the minister, intervention by the elders, and a final vote from the laity. Often, before a censure case appeared before the congregation, the church elders met with the sinner to counsel and urge confession. Ministers consulted the elders on the nature of the sin, or discussed those sinners who refused to repent. As ministers and elders handled private sins, only public sins were tried before the congregation. Generally, public sins were those transgressions committed in front of one or two witnesses, while private sins concerned internal struggles of piety. Cotton Mather's list of public sins included: swearing, cursing, Sabbath breaking, drunkenness, fighting, defamation, fornication, being unchaste, cheating, stealing, lying, and idleness. Such sins frequently involved disrupting the social order or undermining the covenant's obligation to maintaining a godly community. Neither Puritan doctrine nor ministers differentiated censures in any gendered way: the same rules, sins, and expectations for confessions applied to men and women alike. Puritan doctrine maintained that souls were spiritually equal and that everyone had equal access to membership, redemption, and God.

The gendering of Puritanism occurred as laymen enforced different censure standards for men and women. Congregations censured men for dereliction of public duty, whether it was filing false lawsuits, arguing over property lines, charging inflated prices, tearing down a neighbor's mill, whaling on the Sabbath, land fraud, or poor military conduct. In the winter of 1682, when the Westfield congregation censured John Maudsley for "dishonoring God," they were concerned about a lawsuit he filed against the town. He was upset about a recent land distribution and talk of a new highway going through his property. His congregation estimated he broke the fifth, eighth, ninth, and tenth commandments. For the fifth commandment of honoring thy father and mother, they cited his unrighteous lawsuit against the town. With the eighth commandment, "thou shalt not steal," the congregation argued Maudsley

[13]See Cotton, *The Keyes*. This practice of lay voting power was unique to the Congregational churches of the Puritans. Presbyterians had elders and lay leaders meet privately to discuss and decide censure action.

[14]Hall, *Faithful Shepherd*, 12.

was "stirring up authority" to get his land, and not following "lawful proceedings." As for the ninth commandment of "not bearing false witness," they decided that Maudsley lied when he argued that he did not get proper satisfaction in the land deal. And, finally, they cited the tenth commandment about coveting thy neighbor's house to argue that he would not have proceeded with the lawsuit if he followed such law. The Westfield congregation accepted his promise "to meddle no more in this matter," and they warned him to "be more watchful."[15] His congregation chose to address the legal and business ventures of Maudsley, focusing on how his actions disrupted the public order.

Congregations censured men for their public behavior and business dealings. In 1639, Boston's First Church censured the merchant Robert Keayne for inflating prices to the dishonor of God. Keayne took this censure very seriously, not as a warning that he endangered his soul, but that his reputation, and thus his business, would suffer.[16] In 1681, church elders went to Thomas Davenport's house to counsel him over fraud in a land deal.[17] In 1696, Boston's Second Church censured James Fowl for neglecting his militia watch.[18] Congregations used the power of church discipline to regulate men's behavior in civil affairs. In turn, they emphasized the importance of men's secular actions for male religiosity.

Lacking formal power in the secular world, women rarely faced as many charges over businesses. However, even when commercial disputes arose for a woman, her congregation treated her differently than a man. In 1696, Dorchester's Sister Chaplain borrowed money from John Green to buy a shipment of wine. When Green died and his estate tried to collect the debt from Chaplain, she refused. The congregation did not cite her for breaking a contract, but censured her for lying.[19] Like Abigail Dewy and the great hen scandal, Chaplain's censure was not about property, debt, or fighting; it was about a personal lie, a sin of character. The disciplinary process required women to examine their inner natures, not their public responsibilities.

Throughout the first three generations in New England, Puritans consistently emphasized discipline. Yet, outside of Connecticut, churches could only discipline full members. During the founding years, that was not much of an issue, as most everyone who made the journey across the Atlantic became members. However, as full membership declined during the second

[15]Taylor, *Church Records*, 178–79.

[16]Boston First Church, 1639. For a discussion about how this censure humiliated and disgraced him, see Bernard Bailyn, ed., *The Apologia of Robert Keayne: The Self-Portrait of a Puritan Merchant* (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1964), vii–viii.

[17]Hope, ed., *Records of the First Church of Dorchester*, 86.

[18]Boston Second Church, 1696.

[19]Hope, ed., *Records of the First Church of Dorchester*, 112–14.

generation, congregations had to confront the growing number of residents who fell outside the power of church discipline. In 1662, ministers devised the Half-way Covenant, which put more people under church discipline by defining half-way members as baptized children of visible saints. Although these half-way members could not vote or partake in the Lord's Supper, they could now be censured and could have their own children baptized. Censures actually increased during the second generation. In 1680, the second generation also adopted the Cambridge "Platform of Church Discipline," which further elucidated the purpose of censures:

> The censures of the church are appointed by Christ for the preventing, removing, and healing of offenses in the church; for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren; for the deterring others from the like offences; for purging out the leaven which may infect the whole lump; for vindicating the honor of Christ, and of his Church, and the whole profession of the gospel; and for preventing the wrath of God.[20]

In 1701, Reverend Edward Taylor wrote that censures "recover the Poore Soule from his wound [of Satan], and take the Captive out of the hand of the adversary; As also to keep the Holy Place clean from being defiled."[21] First and second generation Puritan ministers emphasized the importance of church discipline for maintaining a holy community.[22] If the church did not recover or "purge out" the sinner, he could "infect" the whole community, whence God could send his wrath down on the town in judgment.[23] Maintaining social order was critical for a godly community, and ministers argued that every Puritan had a responsibility for personal piety and public duty.

Congregations censured men and women for a wide variety of sinful behaviors. This included: dishonoring the Sabbath, child or spousal abuse, lack of deference, immodesty, absence from church, stealing, false witness, cursing, contempt for church, idleness, witchcraft, entertaining sin, lying, fornication, and drunkenness. Censure represented the only judgment or

[20]*The Cambridge and Saybrook Platforms of Church Discipline, with the Confession of Faith of the New England Churches, adopted in 1680* (Boston: T.R. Marvin, 1829), 54–55.

[21]Taylor, *Church Records*, 174.

[22]For a discussion of church discipline, see Charles Francis Adams, *Some Phases of Sexual Morality and Church Discipline in Colonial New England* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1891); Gerald Harris, "The Beginnings of Church Discipline: 1 Corinthians 5," *New Testament Studies* 37, no. 1 (January 1991): 1–21; Emil Oberholzer, Jr., *Delinquent Saints: Disciplinary Action in the Early Congregational Churches of Massachusetts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956); Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *Church Courts and Church Disciplines* (London: John Murray, 1843).

[23]For a discussion of the roots of church discipline in European Puritanism, see Amy Nelson Burnett, "Church Discipline and Moral Reformation in the Thought of Martin Bucer," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 22, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 439–56; and Wilberforce, *Church Courts*.

punishment Puritans could instigate against one another within the church; they could not fine, jail or execute a sinner. An accused sinner could be found innocent, forgiven, admonished, suspended from the Lord's Supper, or excommunicated. An admonishment, suspension, or excommunication would hang over the sinner until the congregation determined that the sinner had adequately confessed and repented.

At times, an offender could be both tried in court for a crime and censured in the church for a sin in order to enforce the social order. The Suffolk County Court and the First Church of Dorchester received complaints about Robert Spur and Joseph Belcher. The Court first admonished Robert Spur at the January 26, 1675, session for "entertaining persons at his house . . . to the grief of theire wives & Relations." The court warned Spur "upon his peril not to entertain any married men to keep company with his daughter especially James Minott & Joseph Belcher."[24] Spur's congregation also admonished him for his neglect of fatherly duties. However, neither the church nor court (nor his wife's move to Braintree) could dissuade Joseph Belcher's nighttime visits to Spur's daughter, Waitstill.[25] In 1677, the courts briefly imprisoned Belcher and fined Robert Spur, while the congregation issued censures.[26] Puritans believed civil and ecclesiastical authorities should protect the godly way. Leaders in Massachusetts and Connecticut shared ideals about Christian watchfulness, a civil government based on the word of God, and a system of censures and punishments for those who transgressed.[27]

A sinner had to confess his transgressions in front of the entire congregation. While a woman frequently had the option of having her confession read aloud for her, the audience in the meeting hall still focused all their attention on her. As the minister or deacon read her confession, all eyes were on the sinner.

[24]Allyn Bailey Forbes, ed., *Records of the Suffolk County Court 1671–1680*, 2 vols. (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1933), 1:676.

[25]Hope, ed., *Records of the First Church of Dorchester*, 79.

[26]Forbes, ed., *Records of the Suffolk County Court*, 809–10. Edmund Morgan talks about this case as a way the courts attempted to protect husbands from temptations. See Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Essays on Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Boston: Trustees of the Public Library, 1944), 41. However, it should also be viewed as a method to protect wives from wayward husbands, and even to protect daughters. Waitstill Spur (who may have been underage) was never charged in court or church. Her father failed to protect her; Robert Spur failed in his duty to protect her and to respect the marriage covenant for Belcher and Minott. See also Hope, ed., *Records of the First Church of Dorchester*, 79–81, 84.

[27]Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd*, 1, 122; Bruce C. Daniels, *The Connecticut Town: Growth and Development, 1635–1790* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1979), 65; Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion and Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 239–40; Kai T. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Wiley, 1966), 55–58. Erikson describes the relationship between church and state that "magistrates would act as a secular arm in the service of the church . . . while the ministers would provide the final authority for most questions related to long-range policy."

Censure cases were supposed to be lessons for the entire congregation, to encourage the entire community to walk orderly by using the sinner as an example. Therefore, each censure became part theater and part religious edification. The congregation listened for key words and phrases that displayed humility, sincerity, and penitence. The sinner had to convey his or her true remorse in front of neighbors, family, friends, and foes. There was a fine line between displaying the humility necessary for forgiveness and humiliating oneself in front of one's community. More than one sinner cracked under such social pressure. Men lost their voices, women cried, and some simply refused to appear for years on end.[28]

As sinners confessed in front of their entire communities, men and women sat in the pews and watched their neighbors, knowing they could face the same humiliation. In 1681, the pressure was too much for Mary Modesly, who stood before her congregation to answer the charges of fornication, but only "wept for the shame."[29] Censures were important religious practices which ensured the godliness of the whole community. The power given to the laity made the social dimensions of censure significant. The expectations and fears of the audience, the sinner as neighbor, and religious pressures all came together in that moment.

As a public performance, the laity developed different standards of censure for men and women. It was easier for laity to expect women to display obedience, humility, servility, and self-debasement. Laymen did not necessarily want to humiliate their fellow men the same way. In her exploration of the feminization of Puritanism, historian Elizabeth Reis asserts that both men and women adopted a feminine spiritual demeanor. She explains that men adopted a feminine spirituality while maintaining an outward masculinity because men "could distinguish between their innate selves (their souls) and the rest of themselves (mind and body)" while women accepted their depravity as "encompassing [their] entire being."[30] Reis clearly demonstrates this to be the case in male conversion narratives, which were shared privately with ministers and in the public and private

[28]For a discussion of Puritan psychology, see Charles Lloyd Cohen, *God's Caress: The Psychology of Puritan Religious Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Erikson, *Wayward Puritans*. For a discussion on social controls, see E. Brooks Holifield, "Peace, Conflict, and Ritual in Puritan Congregations," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23, no. 3 (Winter 1993): 551–70; Raymond A. Mentzer, *Sins and the Calvinists: Morals, Control, and the Consistory in the Reformed Tradition* (Kirksville, Mo.: Sixteenth-Century Journal Publishers, 1994); Gerald F. Moran and Maris A. Vinovskis, *Religion, Family and the Life Course: Explorations in the Social History of Early America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1992); and William E. Nelson, *Dispute and Conflict Resolution in Plymouth County, Massachusetts, 1725–1825* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981).

[29]Hope, ed., *Records of the First Church of Dorchester*, 87.

[30]Elizabeth Reis, *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 41–42.

writing of ministers. Male laity may have privately expressed a feminized spirituality, but in the public realm of church discipline, they refused to either acquiesce or make demands that would reveal this softer self. Traditional notions of colonial masculinity conflicted with Puritan mandates for censure confessions, and ideas of masculinity won out over Puritan ideals of a feminized soul.

Ideas about masculinity and femininity in the seventeenth century influenced male laity in gendering the disciplinary process. In recent years, several historians such as Phyllis Mack, Elizabeth Reis, Amanda Porterfield, Susan Juster, and Carolyn Merchant have examined the various contemporary theoretical understandings of masculinity and femininity. Protestant reformers, philosophers, and scientists explained how women's bodies and souls were unstable, causing them to be irrational, weak, emotional, and dependent. Mack explains how society believed that female bodies were more "wet and spongy," which made her "lustful, irrational, emotional . . . moody, and impulsive, which is why men needed to control them."[31] Protestant John Knox, in a 1558 tract to discredit women as political rulers, asserted that because women were physically and mentally weaker, they were meant to be obedient servants to their husbands.[32] John Calvin argued that it was because of Eve's original sin that women were forced into the role of the subservient wife.[33] Seventeenth-century society viewed men as strong and rational. Men were not judged by their inherent nature, but by their social status and public reputations. Men were public beings, associated with the material world, while women were understood to be private, internal, and spiritual. Reis, Mack, and Porterfield illustrate how Protestants viewed the souls as feminine. When minister Thomas Shephard lamented the sinful nature of human souls, he compared the soul to a woman. "When the soul sees that all its righteousness is a monstrous cloth, polluted with sin . . . it beings to cry out, How can I stand or appear before him with such continual pollutions."[34] Puritan ministers called all their congregants to be both pious and dutiful, to watch over the community, and to be humble, passive, and meek before God. The clergy defined a feminized Puritanism

[31]Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 25–26. See also Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), 5.

[32]John Knox, "The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regime of Women," quoted in Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper Row, 1980), 145.

[33]Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, 146.

[34]Thomas Shepard, *The Sound Believer*, quoted in Mack, *Visionary Women*, 19.

for both the men and women in their congregations.[35] Porterfield argues that ministers demanded female piety from their congregations as a vehicle for social cohesion.[36]

In his work on cultural rituals, Victor Turner describes "social dramas," which involve a four-step process: the breach of social norms, the crisis, adjustments or redress, and reintegration or permanent breach. The ritual of church discipline fits within this Turnerian definition: the sin, calling the sinner to confess, the confession to the congregation, and acceptance or excommunication. The congregation participated in this social drama not only to witness and judge but to heed a lesson. In the stage of adjustment or redress, Turner asserts that an individual enters a stage of "liminality," where normal rules and roles are suspended and reversed. In such a model, at the moment of confession, the sinner would become liminal, a man would become feminine and a woman would become masculine. Caroline Bynum Walker argues that Turner's model of liminality only applies to men, that women do not reverse their roles but reinforce their existing attributes. Walker's contention is applicable to female censures, as congregations expected female confessors to contain a feminized language and demeanor. However, Turner's model does not even apply to male sinners. While doctrine, sermons, conversions, and covenants may have required a liminal state for men, the laity in charge of church discipline did not. The audience participating in the social drama influenced the liminality of the redress. The male laity did not expect or require men to enter such a stage. Within their confessions, men affirmed their masculinity and women reinforced their femininity, thus creating different religious experiences.[37]

Congregations required a more penitent and self-debasing confession from women. In 1665, the Salem congregation charged Remember Samon with fornication. The congregation noted that her confession expressed "shame

[35]Historians of early American religion have called attention to the disjuncture between lay–cleric belief systems in the scholarship over the last fifteen years, such as Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*; Cohen, *God's Caress*; and Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990). Countering this recent historiography, and asserting that the laity agreed with their minister, is George Selement, "The Meeting of Elite and Popular Minds at Cambridge, New England, 1638–1645," *William and Mary Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (January 1984): 32–48. Selement's article is instructive in the influence Shepard had over the newly admitted members to his congregation. This study needs to be sensitive to the level of influence ministers had over confessions and censures within their parishes.

[36]Amanda Porterfield, *Female Piety in Puritan New England: The Emergence of Religious Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 7.

[37]Victor Tuner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), 166–203; Caroline Walker Bynum, "Women's Stories, Women's Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner's Theory of Liminality," chapter 1 in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone, 1991), 29, 32, 35, 37–40.

before the Lord and his people, desiring her soul might be washed from her sinned by the blood of Christ and that the people of God would pray for her." However, the pastor and several deacons had to confirm that they received an even more "enlarged penitential confession" from Samon before the congregation accepted it. Later, the same congregation accepted a less penitent confession from a male congregant. In 1669, the Salem congregation convened after Joseph Williams confessed to theft because his confession was "more dry and more general than was desired." It took several laymen in good standing to testify on his behalf for them to accept it.[38] Samon's confession expressed much more humility than Williams, yet both had to be reevaluated. The Salem audience required less stringent language codes from its men.

Ministers consistently used feminine metaphors and language in their sermons and writings to illustrate correct Puritan piety.[39] When William Brattle delivered sermons in Cambridge in the late seventeenth century, he described conversion as the process of turning a lion into a lamb and the "marriage of ye lamb" to Christ, the bridegroom. He lectured that "ye bride makes herself ready . . . fit for ye entertainment of a great king; it is ye solemn marriage of ye lamb." When lecturing on prayer, Brattle reminded his listeners of the need for a feminized demeanor: "They ought to pray unto God with an abasing and humbling sense of [guilt] upon their hearts . . . they ought to pray with a deep sense of their unworthiness. . . . and even thus with ye deepest of self abasement and inward humility." Brattle described a feminine, supplicant congregant who waited for Christ as an eager bride.[40]

Many Puritan clerics utilized the metaphor of laymen and women as the bride, with Christ as bridegroom. Boston's John Oxenbridge described a "royal reception" that the bridegroom Christ would offer his bride.[41] Westfield minister and poet Edward Taylor frequently used feminized imagery to describe one's relationship with Christ. In his poem, "Let Him Kiss Me with the Kisse of His Mouth," he prayed for a kiss and Christ's "sweet love." With great intimacy, he wrote that "the prayers of love ascend in gracious tune to him as music, and as heart perfume." Taylor described a feminized spiritual eroticism. He wrote that he would "prepare his soul as a 'feather bed . . . with gospel pillows, sheets and sweet perfumes' to welcome Christ the lover." Historian Richard Godbeer details how Taylor portrayed

[38]Richard D. Pierce, ed., *The Records of the First Church of Salem, Massachusetts, 1629–1736* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1974), 122.

[39]See Reiss, *Damned Women*, 39, 101.

[40]William Brattle, Sermons Delivered in Cambridge, ms., William Brattle II, Misc. Volume, Massachusetts Historical Society.

[41]John Oxenbridge, Conversion of the Gentiles, ms., Msc. SBd–56, Massachusetts Historical Society, 1690.

the soul as a womb waiting to be implanted by Christ's seed.[42] John Cotton also wrote about waiting for Christ with particular eroticism. In a 1651 sermon, Cotton asked his congregation, "Have you the strong desire to meet him in the bed of loves . . . and desire to have the seeds of his grace shed abroad in your hearts and bring for the fruit of his grace?"[43] Cotton described a person's religious experience as a highly sexual union with Christ, where the congregant became impregnated with God's grace. Ministers preached and practiced such feminized piety. Porterfield contends that "Cotton embodied in his demeanor the Puritan ideal of femaleness."[44]

Sermons consistently listed the benefits of a feminized soul, and described a pious Christian as a submissive and humble female.[45] Alternatively, albeit equally feminizing, ministers referred to its members as dependent children. In 1631, William Perkins described how children were breast fed with the milk of the scriptures.[46] Ministers continually described such imagery of dependence and femininity. John Rogers taught that "every child is pregnant . . . with the seeds of all sin." The metaphor of pregnant sin called on a Puritan to imagine his body nourishing sin, like a pregnant woman nourishes her child. Such imagery blurred the distinction of body and soul and asked the godly to feminize themselves.[47]

Language was an important vehicle for early American identity. In her 1997 study, Jane Kamensky finds that New Englanders spent a great deal of time "speaking of speaking."[48] Kamensky describes a "gendered verbal order," which dictated appropriate male and female speech. Men employed a "forthright" masculine language, which conveyed authority, respect, and was "forceful-but governed." Seventeenth-century Puritans expected women's speech to be humble and submissive. Kamensky quotes Minister Benjamin Wadsworth, who described how a virtuous woman spoke "in a courteous,

[42]Richard Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America* (Baltimore, Md.: John Hopkins University Press, 2002).

[43]Donald E. Stanford, ed., *The Poems of Edward Taylor* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1963), 142, 164, 212, 230, 248, 259, 295, 362–63, 448; John Cotton, *Christ the Fountain of Life*, 36–37; and Cotton, *Practical Commentary*, 131; quoted in Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, 54.

[44]Porterfield, *Female Piety in Puritan New England*, 66.

[45]See Reis, *Damned Women*; Diane Willen, "Godly Women in Early Modern England: Puritanism and Gender," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 43, no. 4 (October 1992): 561–81; Marilyn J. Westerkamp, "Engendering Puritan Religious Culture in Old and New England," *Pennsylvania History* 64 (1997): 105–22.

[46]William Perkins, *Works*, quoted in Stephen Baskerville, "The Family in Puritan Political Theology," *The Journal of Family History* 18, no. 2 (1993): 161.

[47]John Rogers, *Death the Certain Wages of Sin*, quoted in Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, 68. For a discussion of the body/soul and feminized soul, see Reis, *Damned Women*, 93–120; and Westerkamp, "Engendering Puritan Religious Culture," 105–22.

[48]Jane Kamensky, *Governing the Tongue: The Politics of Speech in Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5.

obliging, respectful manner. In her tongue was the law of kindness."[49] The "gendered verbal order" stemmed from traditional ideas about men and women, about social order and hierarchy, with men as patriarchs and women as docile helpmeets.[50]

However, Puritan ministers challenged the "gendered verbal order" with their expectations that all Puritans should be humble and submissive before God and expected men to present a feminized religious identity and vocabulary. The clergy adopted a feminine language for sermons, covenant renewals, jeremiads, humiliation days, and thanksgiving days. For example, when the townspeople of Dorchester prepared a day of humiliation, the minister "reflected with shame & sorrow upon our unbecoming deportments" and warned the congregation that God would punish them unless they "met our god with humiliation, supplication, & reformation; and timously make our peace with him."[51] Clerics continually emphasized a feminized spirituality.

Ministers also used feminine language in their private journals. Through the published diaries and autobiographies of ministers such as Michael Wigglesworth, Thomas Shepard, and Joseph Sewall, readers are familiar with the language of Puritan clerics. In Sewall's 1711 diary entry he wrote, "Humble me. . . . Show me my sinfulness of nature . . . vanity of heart." He continued to write about how he was a frail, miserable, and sinful creature.[52] In his autobiography, Thomas Shepard wrote, "He is the God that convinced me of my guilt, filth of sin, self-seeking, and love of honor. . . . and humbled me . . . and to loath myself the more."[53] In his diary, Michael Wigglesworth recorded these sentiments, "Blind man! Carnal heart! I am afraid, ashamed, heavy laden under such cursed framed of heart. . . . My soul groans, my body faints. . . . Behold I am vile . . . Lord, what wouldst thou have me to doe?"[54] Clerics embraced the feminized imagery and language of a submissive soul and modeled the ideal Puritan supplicant to Christ.

In their sermons, ministers consistently used a feminized language that became the expected standard for Puritan expression. Cambridge minister William Brattle preached that "they ought to pray with a deep sense of their unworthiness . . . and even thus wth ye deepest [sense] of self-abasement & inward

[49]Kamensky, *Governing the Tongue*, 158, 74, 77; and Benjamin Wadsworth, *The Well-Ordered Family: Or, Relative Duties* (Boston, 1712), cited in Kamensky, *Governing the Tongue*, 77.

[50]See Kamensky, *Governing the Tongue*, 17–42.

[51]Hope, ed., *Records of the First Church of Dorchester*, 71.

[52]Joseph Sewall, Papers 1703–1716, ms., Joseph Sewall Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

[53]Nehemiah Adams, *The Autobiography of Thomas Shepard* (Boston: Pierce and Parker, 1832), 73.

[54]Edmund S. Morgan, ed., *The Diary of Michael Wigglesworth, 1653–1657* (New York: Harper & Row, 1946), 53.

humility."[55] In one of John Cotton's sermons, he urged his listeners to "break open the stony doores of your heart . . . and to give up your soule and body and spirit" to Christ.[56] In another sermon he preached how patience, humility, and zeal could lead to righteousness. And he pointed to faith, love, knowledge, patience, and meekness as the path to purity of heart.[57] Brattle and Cotton urged their congregations to be submissive before Christ, to give themselves completely.

Puritan men did not outright reject such feminization of the soul.[58] While they rejected the public display of a feminized soul in censures, in their private reflections, some Puritan men did write with feminized language. In his diary, Boston's Samuel Sewall recorded his concern that he was not fit to be a church member because of his sinfulness. He described meetings he had with his minister to talk about his "grieving spirit" and his minister advised him to pray.[59] Diaries provided men with an outlet for privately reflecting on their piety without publicly debasing themselves or undermining their masculine reputations. Dorchester's Captain Roger Clap often wrote in his diary about his struggles over the state of his soul. When he believed he was saved, he said that God "transport[ed] me as to make me cry out upon my bed with loud voice He is come, He is come. And God did melt my heart at that time so that I could, and did mourn and shed more tears for sin."[60] Privately, men were able to express such feminized spirituality.

Similar to diaries, conversion narratives were private. Men and women wrote such conversion experiences in order for their ministers to consider them for membership. The ministers and deacons privately evaluated the experience and did not share such relations with the entire congregation. Men sometimes utilized feminine language in their conversion relations. When a Dorchester man presented his relation experience to his minister, he called himself "a vile and abominable sinner." He described how "God comforts and delights" his soul and how he was engaged in a fight with the devil for control of his body. "There shall be weeping, wailing and knashing of teeth, amidst these, Satan has been endeavoring to entangle me by his strategies."[61] Yet, men did not present these relations to their entire congregation; their

[55]Brattle, Sermons folder.

[56]Everett H. Emerson, ed., *Gods Mercie Mixed with his Justice; or His Peoples Deliverance in Times o Danger by John Cotton, 1641* (Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars Facsimile Reprints, 1977), 25.

[57]Emerson, ed., *Gods Mercie*, 40–42.

[58]See Reis, *Damned Women*, 93–120; Cohen also discusses the popularity of the topic of the separation of the body and soul in Puritan theology, *God's Caress*, 40.

[59]Samuel Sewall, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674–1729*, 2 vols., ed. M. Halsey Thomas (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1973), 1:38–42.

[60]Captain Roger Clap, *Memoirs of Captain Roger Clap* (Boston: Greenleaf's Printing Office for Samuel Whiting, 1731), 13.

[61]Relation Experience, ms., Collection of the Dorchester Antiquarian and Historical Society Collection, Massachusetts Historical Society. No date or name given.

peers did not hear them. These narratives appealed to the religious elite, clerics, and deacons who encouraged pious introspection.

While men may have privately expressed their piety and questioned their souls, publicly men had to contend with other social expectations of masculinity. This fracture between public and private selves actually undermined men's religious experience. While some men may have pondered their inner piety in private, in the public space of the church they had to present a masculine religious identity. Women were the normative Puritan, as publicly and privately they were able to embrace the tenets of a feminized spirituality. The metaphors of bride, child, and lamb, and the calls to be submissive and humble contrasted with those masculine traits used to describe Puritan men founding and expanding settlements in New England.[62]

Battling the wilderness, negotiating and fighting Indians, and establishing social order required a different set of adjectives for New England patriarchs who headed their communities and their families. Men "conquered" the wilderness to build their communities. The sexual metaphor of the New England man "spoiling" the virgin land contrasted sharply with the submissive sexual metaphor of Puritan piety. Connecticut's Roger Wolcott inked a poem about his emotions at seeing the land for the first time:

> As when the wounded amorous doth spy
> His smiling fortune in his lady's eye,
> O how his veins and breast swell with a flood
> Of pleasing raptures that revive his blood!

In his final stanza, he wrote:

> This most delightful country to posses;
> And forward, with industrious speed, we press,
> Upon the virgin stream, who had, as yet,
> Never been violated with a ship.

Thomas Morton compared New England to "a fair virgin longing to be sped and meet her lover in a nuptual bed." They described how "English industry would fertilize her fruitful womb."[63] Men settling New England celebrated

[62]See Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 18–21; John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Founding of Early American Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 8; Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 13–19.

[63]Roger Wolcott, "A Brief Account of the Agency of the Honorable John Winthrop, Esq. In the Court of King Charles the Second, Annon Dom. 1662," *MHS Collections* 4 (1795), 267; and Thomas Morton, *The New English Canaan* (Boston, 1883), cited in Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, 154–55.

their manhood as conquerors. Men "governed" their families and "led" civil society with "authority." Taming the wilderness required masculinity: fighting, forging, defending, attacking, leading, governing, ruling, building, and conquering. Men had to be strong, assertive, and in control.

Laymen found the combination of a feminized soul and masculine identity more difficult to practice in public. In the public performance of censure confessions most men chose a religious expression that emphasized external duty over self-examination. They chose a masculinized vocabulary that did not debase their natures or internalize their sins. Joseph Pomery of Westfield confessed his sins for failing to collect all the town taxes, "I have not manifested a greater conscientious attendance upon the Duties I were bound, both unto the Town & Countrey respecting the same. . . . Help me with your prayers that the Remainder of my Life might be more to the glory of God, I am Your Brother and Unworthy Fellow Servant in the Fellowship of the Gospell."[64] Absent from Pomery's confession were the feminized words of humiliation, suffering, sorrow, and grief. Pomery did not even use the word sin. We might expect someone censured for failure in a public role to stress responsibility and duty, yet throughout male confessions, the sinner emphasized public duty, not piety, representing an important shift from both the Puritan prescriptions and female confessions. In their symbolic public performance, men tried to protect their manhood by using "speech as a signifier" of their masculinity. Sandra Gustafson describes how "local language communities" created moral, social, and institutional transformation.[65] Laymen reinterpreted the religious edicts to construct their own masculine religious identity. Male venues in the legal, commercial, and political realm created a common "masculine verbal order" that laymen adopted for their public religious voice.[66] The result was that women adopted Puritan doctrine, and men reinterpreted it (Table I–III).

The language used in confessions is important because the laity evaluated a confession to determine if it was sufficient enough for the confessor to receive repentance. In 1678, when Samuel Rigby stood before his Dorchester congregation to confess his sin of drunkenness, his brethren did not accept his confession, finding that it "did not come up to satisfaction."[67] Later that year, the same congregation listened to Nathaniel Mather confess to dishonoring the church, but the congregation ordered him to reappear, saying his confession was "falling short of what he should have attained unto and

[64]Taylor, *Church Records*, 183.

[65]Sandra Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power Oratory and Performance in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), xvii, 16.

[66]For a description of "verbal order," see Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power*, 25.

[67]Hope, ed., *Records of the First Church of Dorchester*, 79.

he 'missing to doe his best to attain more.'"[68] Cotton Mather exhorted that the confession must display "humility, modesty, patience, petition, tears, with reformation."[69] Church members such as Samuel Rigby and Nathaniel Mather faced certain expectations from their congregations regarding their confessions. The laity judged their language for signs of remorse and sincerity. However, the laity went beyond that and evaluated confessions for what they believed to be appropriate gender language.

The congregation weighed a person's reputation on his confession. Neighbors, business associates, family members, friends, and those of varying social status heard and evaluated the confession. While only the male laity voted on the disciplinary action, censures and confessions involved the whole religious community who witnessed the censure. The church would likely forgive the sinner, but how would the congregation remember his or her confession outside the meetinghouse? The laymen confessing had more at stake in their confessions than meeting pious clerical requirements. They had to face the men and women in the community and save their reputation. Men could not jeopardize their public image and status by appearing weak. Men needed to show they were respectable and trusted members of their communities. Women needed to validate their piety and virtue.

The language women used in confession exemplified the remorse and self-abasement that ministers described. Rachel Ashley's lying-in following the birth of her daughter in May 1707 did not pass with the normal course of recovery and social calls to help the new Westfield mother.[70] Instead, within a month of delivery, Ashley appeared before the General Court to receive a fine for fornication. Her Westfield congregation allowed her a bit more rest before they censured her.[71] The young mother confessed to her sisters and brethren:

> Where as to my greate sorrow, publick shame & greate Sin I have been Carryed away by overbearing temptation to the transgressing

[68]Hope, ed., *Records of the First Church of Dorchester*, 80.

[69]Cotton Mather, *Ratio Discipline Fratrum Nov-Anglicorum* (Boston, 1726), 144, cited in Emil Oberholzer, *Delinquent Saints: Disciplinary Action in Early Congregational Churches of Massachusetts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), 30. Oberholzer confirmed that "the sincerity of the penitent must be outwardly manifest."

[70]For information about New England childbirth practices, see Richard W. Wertz and Dorothy C. Wertz, *Lying-In: A History of Childbirth in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1977); Catherine M. Scholten, *Childbearing in American Society: 1650–1850* (New York: New York University, 1985); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard Based on Her Diary, 1785–1812* (New York: Vintage, 1990).

[71]See Taylor, *Church Record*s, 219. Taylor called Rachel "Rebecca," who also conceived a child early, but in 1713. It was Rachel who fornicated with John Madsley, as court documents proved. Rebecca had a child in May 1713, and married Samuel Dewey in 1714. So, likely this is Rachel's confession. The court found John Madsley, who denied fathering the baby, guilty, and ordered him to pay child support. See footnotes for editor's comments.

> God's law . . . & hereby have indeed given Gods people just ground to . . . turn me out of the hearts & respect of Gods people whose Charity I have wounded by my Sin, as well as my own Soule. Wherefore in Sorrow of heart, & sense of so great a sin & Evill against God & my own Soule, as Whoredom . . . the great dishonour to God herein & other Considerations that come upon me of an Heart burdening Nature. . . . pitty me & my poor Soul.

Ashley filled her confession with feminized language the laity expected from her. She used words such as "shame," "wounded," "great sin," "nature," "pity," "evil," "poor," and "grief." The word "sorrow" appeared three times. She focused on her heart, soul, and nature. Her language was debasing and descriptive. The confession conveyed a sense of self-examination, penitence, and a focus on an inner struggle with sin. While concerned with the singular sin of fornication, Ashley's confession revealed a deeper fear over her sinful nature.[72]

For male censure cases, the laity received a confession coded in a masculine language. In 1699, Major Robert Pike complained to his Salisbury congregation that his brothers Nathaniel Brown and John Eastman claimed some land that was rightfully Pike's. After much insistence from Pike, Brown and Eastman offered a joint confession:

> Tho we were not conscious to our own souls that have we wittingly transgressed the rules . . . and yet if in any of these we have been guilty of a breach in ye church rules in words or actions we do profess [we are] sorry for them and beg forgiveness of your self and of all the church desiring to live in love and unity with you.

Brown and Eastman did not debase their souls, on the contrary they professed that their souls were unaware that they broke any rules. Internally they felt innocent. They expressed concern about rules and neighborly relations. They did not even use the word sin, but apologized if their actions broke laws. Major Pike did not agree with the resolution to the disputed land, and he showed his frustration by neglecting to go to communion. In 1702, the congregation urged him to repent, and he offered a confession:

> With denying and absenting from communion from church, I have so offended as to incur a censure . . . I hereby desire of all my brethren charity and pass by my offense . . . I desire to embrace in charity and in covenant unity with the church.[73]

He was more concerned with his relationships in the community and that his actions transgressed acceptable boundaries. Male confessions used words

[72]For a description of the experiences of Puritan religious cycles of conversion, confession, grace, sin, redemption, and so on, see Cohen, *God's Caress*, 5, 76, 119.

[73]Records of the First Church of Salisbury, ms., Massachusetts Historical Society, 1699–1702.

like "rules," "breach," "offense," "desire," "forgiveness," "actions," and "brethren." Through their language, men linked their religious identity to their larger communities.

Men adopted a masculine language they were accustomed to using in business, contracts, and legal affairs. In February 1663, Stephen Fosdick appealed to his Charlestown congregation to release him from the excommunication he had been under since 1643 for neglecting services. Fosdick analyzed his "offense" in speaking against the church, and he acknowledged his willingness to reform and repent. It was the covenant—a contract he broke, his outward ties to his brethren—and not the state of his soul that became the focus of his confession. He confessed to breaking a "solemn promise or engagement."[74] Men admitted to similar lapses of obligation in civil courts when associates sued them for bad faith, contractual disputes, or property issues. The cases centered on external issues or problems without comment on men's natures.

Most male confessors apologized for poor conduct. When Solomon Phips got into a public argument with John Fowle in 1688, he regretted that his "words and deeds" offended Fowle, acknowledged his poor behavior, and recognized that he needed the congregation's help. Yet, he could not admit his sinful nature.[75] Phips focused on a particular sin, a wayward path. Similarly, when David Winchill offered repentance for uttering unchristian words about Suffield minister John Younglove, he called his words "evil, sinful and offensive" explaining in his confession in front of his Westfield brethren that he "was Surprised with a Temptation e're I was aware. . . . And [I] fell short of what the Rule & Duty requires. . . . And being in Covenant Relations to yourselves & sensible of matter of offense you would help me with your prayers. . . . that . . . I may be inabled to walke more to his Glory."[76] Winchill was surprised by his sinful behavior because he did not believe it was part of his own nature.[77] Women did not voice surprise over their sins because they readily acknowledged their sinful souls.

Congregations adopted the gendered language in their own descriptions of male and female sin. In a sampling of church records that offer descriptive language of fifty men and thirty-two women, congregations accuse 66 percent of men of neglecting duty, breaking rules, or disturbing the peace with their behavior, while only 19 percent of the female cases used such

[74]James Frothingham Dunnewell, ed., *Records of the First Church in Charlestown, 1632–1789* (Boston: David Clapp and Son, 1880), iii.

[75]Dunnewell, ed., *Records of the First Church in Charlestown, 1632–1789*, ix–x.

[76]Taylor, *Church Records*, 185–87.

[77]For a further discussion of men noting their particular sin and not their sinful natures, see Reis, *Damned Women*, 12–54; and Richard Godbeer, "'The Cry of Sodom': Discourse, Intercourse, and Desire in Colonial New England," *William and Mary Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (April 1995): 259–86.

language. Church records employ words such as "sorrow," "wicked heart," "shame," "body," "tongue," or "soul" on 8 percent of the male censures, yet these words appear on 60 percent of female censures. Congregations warned men to stay on a godly path but exhorted women to search their souls. Language became an important way for Puritans to enforce gendered expectations for godly men and women and played a significant role in how Puritans developed different patterns of responsibility, identity, and duty in the church.

In their "errand into the wilderness" to create a true church, first generation ministers attempted to alter traditional gender rules by structuring a faith in which all souls were equal. However, through the daily practices of their religion, laymen reinterpreted the ministerial standards because they could not adhere to the feminized prescriptions. Men developed a public religious identity that allowed them to maintain their masculine identity as well.

By examining the language of confessions, we can see how Puritan congregations began to reinforce men's secular roles through patterns of church discipline. Using a language that emphasized civic duty, men distanced themselves from the meetinghouse by the early eighteenth century, thus distancing themselves from women, who remained tied to the meetinghouse to express their religiosity. Language enforced a pattern that became a practice of community.

When the Westfield congregation censured Abigail Dewy for lying about the great neighborly hen squabble in 1714, what was at issue was not just her lying words but also her lying tongue. Both men and women faced censure charges for lying or slander, but their congregations gendered their censures. The Dorchester church called Sister Patten more than a sinner when they censured her for slander in 1696. The church asserted that Patten "cast contempt" on the whole process of private business dealings when she said that Brother Hix lied and perjured himself over an agreement they had made. The church accused her of "often indulging in Corruptions & passions of her Evill heart and evill language of her hasty tongue." When the wife of celebrated Captain Thomas Clark aimed her spurious comments against the General Court and the governor, the Dorchester church censured her for "slanderous and lying expressions of her tongue." Yet, when William Sumner uttered disparaging remarks about the Committee of the Militia in 1675, he received satisfaction for his "offensive speech."[78] Boston's Second Church censured John Farnum for making bad comments about another church and its pastor, and they noted he was "breaking the rule of truth." However, that same congregation recorded much harsher words about Sarah Stevens, whom they admonished for "many evill carriages and sundry filthy

[78]Hope, ed. *Records of the First Church of Dorchester*, 112, 51, 69.

speeches, not fit to be named." And when they censured her, they said she "grew more vile and hard hearted." The court also took up her case and sentenced her to jail and two whippings.[79] Churches focused women's slanderous and lying sins literally on their bodies, commenting on their evil hearts, minds, and tongues. A common English street ballad echoed the sentiment about women's evil tongues and the danger they posed: "No venomous snake stings like a woman's tongue."[80] Disciplinary records describe how men made some offensive speech or that their words were morally corrupt. The emphasis for men was on their actions, not their corrupt bodies or debased natures.

If ever a Puritan man needed a serious examination of his soul, it was Edward Mills of Boston. In 1699, the Boston Second Church found his salacious acts to be "too abominable to be mentioned." Among his various and sundry sins, Mills took a virtuous landlady of "laudable character" and made her an adulteress. They blamed the breakup of her family on Mills's "lewd, vile and lascivious carriage." Instead of confessing, he fled the country. He returned later that year, resumed a life of gambling and games, and spent most evenings at a tavern with company of ill-repute. The church expressed its concern that his "family suffered under a scandalous misgovernment." We can only imagine bad-boy Mills laughing as he boasted of "his wickedness, even of no less than incestuous wickedness." He got into several fights with neighbors and slandered "several young gentlewomen" by calling them "infamous whores." And yet, the church maintained that all they sought from him was a "shadow of repentance," any sign of his remorse. Instead, Mills sent the elders a "rude, venomous, and villainous paper," arguing that they had no proof against him. Without any other recourse, his congregation concluded, "He was not only an abomination unto the Lord, but was also intolerable and abominable to all Civil Society."[81] Throughout the long record of his misadventures, the congregation never once reprimanded Mills for his troubled soul. Instead, the laity focused on his reputation, his familial duty, and his threat to the community.

If the character of a colonial town depended on its village drunkards, then Dorchester could be counted among the most colorful. Whether from prominent families, the servant class, military stock, young or old, many a man sometimes found himself too drunk to "walk orderly" as the church commanded, or even to walk himself home. The church was not interested in censuring the quiet men who drank themselves to sleep at night in their own

[79]Records of the Second Church of Boston, Massachusetts Historical Society, m.s., Volume 3, 1672.
[80]Quoted in Mack, *Visionary Woman*, 31.
[81]Records of the Second Church of Boston, 1699.

homes. They sought out those drunks who made public spectacles of themselves—those lying in the gutters, those slurring prayers during Sunday services, or those who could not walk the straight line, as it were, in colonial minds. The laity expressed concern about a drunkard's poor civic behavior and lack of responsibility.

During a fine Dorchester summer day on a deserted road near town, a drunken Consider Atherton swerved and fell from his horse. About an hour later, a group of women and a church elder traveling along the road approached Atherton lying face down fast asleep, his hat strewn aside and his steed feeding nearby. When Elder Blake tried to awaken him, the passed-out Atherton hardly budged. Once conscious, he was still so drunk that he merely reeled and staggered off, without remorse or an explanation. Consider's illustrious father, the decorated Major General Humphrey Atherton, had also taken a fall from a horse in a fatal accident, but under much different circumstances. Major General Atherton may have been on everyone's mind as they watched his drunken son amble away.

The incident forced the Dorchester church to call Consider Atherton yet again to deal with his sin of drunkenness. During his appearance in July 1688, Atherton explained that he had visited ordinaries in Roxbury and Boston on his way home, which precipitated the nap along the side of the road. Disappointed with his explanation, the congregation noted his drunken offenses the previous spring and suggested that perhaps he visited too many taverns. Atherton then wrote a vague confession that still did not satisfy the church. Pastor John Danforth decided that maybe he could get somewhere with the young Atherton if they met privately to talk about his problem. Danforth must have been saddened and frustrated when Consider arrived for their scheduled appointment too soused to talk coherently, let alone confront his sins. Atherton had to excuse himself, whereby he immediately passed out under a nearby bridge. People who found him later could not wake him, and the story circulated he was up all night at Chaplin's ordinary with "other company."[82]

The church first censured Atherton for drunkenness five years earlier, in 1683, by which time he had already established a pattern, for the records showed he "had fallen into ye sine of drunknes both formerly & now againe of late." Consider's relationship with the bottle could be traced all the way back to 1678, when the Suffolk County Court convicted him for breaking into Nicholas Bolton's house to steal cider.[83] Now on his fifth appearance in front of his congregation, the brethren had lost patience with Consider. On July 15, 1688, they admonished him and discussed excommunication. It

[82]Hope, ed., *Records of the First Church of Dorchester*, 91, 96.
[83]Forbes, ed., *Records of the Suffolk County Court*, 957.

must have been a disappointment that an Atherton had fallen. Consider's father helped found the church and town and became an important Indian negotiator and a celebrated war hero. Consider's brother, Hope, attended Harvard, taught school in Dorchester, and then took over the pulpit in Hadley. Unfortunately, Consider started his own genealogical heritage, as his son Humphrey would face five censure charges for drunkenness in later years.

Consider's behavior became intolerable to his community. The congregation judged him to be "an obstinate ofendor & an incorrigible drunkard." They lamented how his "idleness, his breach of former promises, his rebellion against ye church" had become an increasing concern for the entire town.[84] His congregation especially rued Atherton's failure to live up to his duty to his community, his neglect of his promises, and his failure to act as a godly man.

For Puritan men, drunkenness became about a failure of duty.[85] Men faced over 79 percent of the censure charges for drunkenness. Churches could have discussed the sin in terms of a weak nature that would place a sinner's piety into question. Yet, over and again, when censuring men, their churches emphasized their failure of religious conduct, focusing on their outward behavior, and not their inner soul.

The records of disciplinary cases illustrate how churches described male drunkenness as an external force. Churches frequently recorded how a sinner was "overtaken" with drink, or they note a "miscarriage" of drinking and the sinner's "neglect of duty."[86] To be "overtaken" with drink suggested that blame did not rest on the sinner's internal weakness, but that the evil of alcohol attacked him. The sinner was a victim of an outside wickedness. When the Plymouth congregation censured John Grey in 1703, they noted previous attempts to rescue Grey from his sin, "Sundry times solemnly admonished by ye church and all due paines taken with him to Endeavour to reclaim him from the Ill course of life as swearing drunkenness." Unable to save him, they excommunicated Grey as an "unprofitable branch and declare yt ye church would have no more to do with him." His church tried to save him from the alcohol abuse that had overpowered him. By labeling Grey as "unprofitable," the congregation focused on his inability to contribute to the community. An investment in him would not yield benefits to the whole.[87] The church believed that alcohol prevented him from living up to his responsibilities to the godly community.

[84]Hope, ed., *Records of the First Church of Dorchester*, 96.
[85]Hope, ed., *Records of the First Church of Dorchester*, 75, 80, 81; Forbes, ed., *Records of the Suffolk County Court*, 846, 940.
[86]For examples, see Hope, ed., *Dorchester First Church*; and Boston Second Church.
[87]*Plymouth Church Records, 1620–1859* (New York: John Wilson & Son, 1920), 97.

Male confessors also acknowledged how their sins prevented them from fulfilling their Puritan duties. Sinners censured for drunkenness "acknowledged" their sins, or "neglect of duty," or "manifested repentance," but they did not pray for more piety. Westfield's Stephen Kellog acknowledged he was a "sinful creature," but he did not ask for internal strength or a closer relationship with God, nor did he promise to search his soul. He asked for outside help by "hoping God would enable him to walk with greater watchfulness."[88] Men confessed to their sins without any self-debasing reflection. During their censures, men offered apologies and asked for help in mending their ways and improving their conduct, but they did not pray for their souls.

Conversely, congregations did admonish drunken women for their lack of piety and questioned the inner state of their souls. Even when there was not enough actual proof to formally censure Plymouth's Lydia Cushman for drunkenness, the church warned her "to consider that the Lord is a Jealous God, whose Eyes are as a Flaming Fire, who searcheth the Rains and the Heart and will give to every man according to his work."[89] Unlike the treatment of her male counterparts, the congregation urged Cushman to look inward, to examine her heart. Similarly, the Boston Second Church noted that Mary Cox "abandoned herself in a course of drunkenness and other scandals."[90] Alcohol did not overtake Cox; rather she lost her true self. The church emphasized how Cox abandoned her piety and even her own body with her sinfulness. Her struggle was not about being "profitable" to the community or overcoming outside temptations, but to regain her true self. When six members of the Boston Church testified they saw Ruth Fuller drunk on various occasions, four of them said she "disguised herself" with drink. Drinking caused Fuller to not be herself, not look like herself, not to be recognizable. In the dozens of male cases from 1630 to 1725, not one censure record used such internal, individual language about a man's body, heart, or soul. Yet, continually for women, the congregation emphasized the internal nature of their sins. The feisty and defiant Fuller had other ideas about her own body, however, and argued that she "would be hanged on ye gallows before she said anything."[91] Ruth Fuller exemplified those who did not care about their standing in the community or their church membership. But the vast majority of Puritan women did attempt to meet the pious standards of their congregations.

[88]Taylor, *Church Records*, 211.
[89]*Plymouth Church Records*, 237.
[90]Boston Second Church Records, 1706.
[91]Boston Second Church Records, 1685.

Puritanism required sinful women to regularly question their internal piety. In 1667, Elizabeth Healy faced her congregation for the sin of fornication with Sam Reynolds. While spending an evening together, they got drunk and had sex. She ended up pregnant (a familiar morality tale for the youth of any time period). The congregation only sought to censure Healy. And while she explained that Sam "got her drunk," she did not blame him but put all responsibility on her sinful nature. The young girl's confession resonated with remorse over her lack of piety:

> It is my hearts desire to confess and bewail my sin before God and his people . . . and by ye great and open sin I may be humbled before God for all my sins of disobedience & against the gospel . . . but have furlowed my low hearts lusts and justly hath . . . left me to the corrupting of my nature . . . with yt great sin so far I know my own heart . . . my great ignorance . . . left me open to hordom . . . it is a sinsir desire of my heart to beewal my sin. . . . and pray of Gods people that. . . . the remainder of my life might bee abundant by mor to his glory.

Healy clearly articulated what ministers preached from congregational doctrine: a person's corrupting nature left her open to sin if she did not constantly seek God's word. It was not the alcohol or the heated sexual advances of Sam that doomed her. Healy believed she could have prevented that horrible night if she was more pious.[92] While this is evidence of a still prevailing sexual double standard, it also indicates that young women internalized their sins.

Like her godly sisters, Healy evaluated her soul because she understood the rewards of piety and its self-abasing nature. Piety offered a spiritual union with Christ, a religious experience of grace incomparable, and status for women as church members that they could not achieve in any other public forum. Yet piety also required an internal struggle, a process of self-examination that was critical, humiliating, and debasing.[93]

Nothing illustrates the male dilemma of feminized spirituality better than fornication censures. Eighty-four percent of all fornication censure cases

[92]See Elizabeth Healy, "Confession on Paternity" (Folio 2. Misc. 1667–1669: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1667).

[93]For a discussion of female piety, see Marilyn Westerkamp, *Women and Religion in Early America, 1600–1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Reis, *Damned Women*; Ann Braude, "Women's History Is American Religious History," in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed (Berkeley: University of California Press), 87–107; Porterfield, *Female Piety in Puritan New England*. All agree that piety elevated women. Porterfield asserts that men found spiritual satisfaction in female piety. This article expands upon Porterfield's argument by suggesting that ministers embraced female piety and in private journals some men adopted such piety, yet publicly laymen chose to express their religiosity through Puritan duty and a more masculine language. Ann Braude contends that the ideals of masculinity were in conflict with the Christian values of piety, 104.

involved women. Overall, churches actually censured more men than women for various offenses (274:163), but the laity rarely censured a man for fornicating, and when they did it was usually in conjunction with censuring his wife. Married couples may have confessed to pre-marital sex as a vehicle to enter the church and baptize their children, yet husbands often went unwillingly to such confessions.[94] Some women complained to their pastors that their husbands would not confess; one woman even dragged her husband into a confession. The newly married Samuel Blake confessed to fornication in 1679, but "his voice was soe low yt scarce any hert yt little whch he spake." In August 1716, Hannah Abrams addressed the Salem congregation after Sabbath services to regain her membership. The congregation suspended her for fornication, evident by her early pregnancy. She explained that she avoided confession because of "the perverseness of her husband, who would not suffer her to make a confession" out of fear that he would face censure as well. During a particularly difficult illness, she swore that if God spared her, she would find a way to confess. The empathetic Salem congregation reinstated the weary goodwife.[95]

A male fornication censure was overwhelmingly linked to a female censure. Two-thirds of the men who confessed to fornication faced censure along with their wives, compared to only 29 percent of women. Indeed, only 1 percent of men censured for fornication were single. Single women composed between 29 and 52 percent of female fornication censures.[96] As husbands, men could confess to fornication as part of their spousal obligations, as a gesture for their wives. More often, only the wives confessed.

In seventeenth-century New England, there are very few cases of men who voluntarily confessed to fornication, and those who did were charged along with their wives. When the Dorchester church charged William Hersey, Jr., and his wife of fornication before marriage, Hersey denied the charge, arguing that he had no "carnal knowledge of her body before that day they were married." The church took sworn testimony, including evidence that "their first child had a full grown body Ripe for the birth & long hair & hard nails & cryd & fed well when it was first born, tho born but five months and 9 days from its parents marriage." Women attending the delivery testified that they "believed no child ever attained such ripeness & perfection at 5 months & nine days from ye conception."[97] Yet, Hersey continued to deny the accusation of fornication, rather than confess in front of his congregation.

[94]For a discussion on some of the social dimensions of church membership, see Anne Speerschneider Brown, "'Bound Up in a Bundle of Life': The Social Meaning of Religious Practice in Northeastern Massachusetts, 1700–1776" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1995).

[95]Pierce, ed., *Records of the First Church of Salem*, 247.

[96]The range indicates those women whose marital status is unclear.

[97]Hope, ed., *Records of the First Church of Dorchester*, 137.

Laymen did not seek out male fornicators as they did female transgressors. An illegitimate pregnancy appeared in only 20 percent of female fornication cases. The gender disparity in fornication censures was not about female church membership or about being able to identify maternity more easily than paternity. With a gender system that viewed a woman as "Eve"—as the temptress, the sinful seductress—it was easy for laymen to make fornication a female sin and not require men to stand before their peers to talk regretfully about their sexual activity. In the more masculine arena of the court, magistrates fined and sentenced men for fornication and forced them to pay child support. But in the feminized sphere of the church, laymen did not charge their fellow men with fornication.

In 1712, the court ordered John Sacket to pay child support to Abiel Williams. While the court fined them both, only Abiel Williams faced censure charges. In her confession, she did not ask for external, communal help in fighting off sin, but asked for God's spirit within her. She focused on her soul and the state of her piety, and her faith:

> That he would pardon my sin and pour out his spirit upon mee. And would secure mee from overbearing temptations and enable me to resist all the assaults of the adversary. That I might walk humbly and without offense and come to an Holie Closing with all God's Rules both in the inward and outward man: & that I might have true and saving repentance, all my dayes, not only of this sin but also of all other sins: and that I may have true Gospell Faith in Christ.

The Westfield church urged Williams to be more "watchful over herself and more humbly walk with God."[98] No congregations ever described a male fornication censure with the same language as they did women, referring to their "shameful sin" or their "scandalous sin." When it came to fornication charges, it seemed easier to fine a man's pocket book in court rather than question his piety in church.

Puritan churches did use female fornication censures to reprimand neglectful men for other sins. When the Plymouth church censured Abigail Billington for fornication, a church elder used that opportunity to warn fathers "to keep up family government."[99] If fathers lived up to their Puritan duty of running an orderly and godly family, then pious daughters would not stray.[100] Again,

[98]Taylor, *Church Records*, 205–6.

[99]*Plymouth Church Records*, 197.

[100]For a discussion of family, see Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*; Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977); Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers*; Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

Puritan society emphasized male performance, a man's paternal and communal responsibilities.

In 1723, before Jonathan Edwards became one of the most famous orators of the revivalist period, he wrote about his bride-to-be, Sarah Peirpont. Edwards described her as a woman of piety, noting how God "comes to her and fills her mind with exceeding sweet delights, and that she hardly cares for anything except to meditate on him." He admired her inner spirituality, her individual relationship with God, and her faith. She was "assured that he loved her too well to let her remain at a distance from him always." He praised her for a piety that enabled her to reject worldly interests:

> Therefore, if you present all the world before her with the richest of its treasures, she disregards it and cares nothing of it and is unmindful of any pain or affliction. She has a strange sweetness in her mind and a singular purity in her affections, is most just and conscientious in her conduct, and you could not persuade her to do anything wrong or sinful if you would give her all the world, lest she should offend the Great being.

Edwards also recognized that his fiancée had an individual connection to God that defined her faith. "She loves to be alone walking in the field and groves and seems to have someone invisible always conversing with her."[101] His love letter about his fiancée also served as praise for the model Christian woman. Like her Puritan sisters, Peirpont tied her identity to her religiosity. She was concerned with a sense of a religious self, her personal path to godliness. Edwards did not praise her as a member of her congregation, or for how well she served others. She walked alone with God. Ministers revered women for their piety, and in turn, women gained a sense of self-worth and status. Some women struggled for decades to gain such rewards.

In 1692, the Dorchester church called the widow Content Mason to the meetinghouse. Although she had been widowed for years, she had just given birth to a baby girl, Eleanor, only two months prior. By then, Peter Wood's wife, Abigail, fled the town and its incessant gossip. Rumors had circulated for years about Mason and Wood. In 1688, widow Mason gave birth to son just a week after Abigail and Peter Wood welcomed the birth of their son. Now it seemed to be confirmed, Content Mason and Peter Wood had a long-time affair. However, instead of appearing before her congregation and facing a whole host of potential charges, the young widow packed whatever money and goods she could carry from her father's house and ran away with Peter. The congregation cast her out of the church that very day for her "great wickedness."[102]

[101]John Stoughton, *Windsor Farmes: A Glimpse of an Old Parish* (Hartford: Clark & Smith Book and Job Printers, 1883), 82–83.

[102]No records in church or court charge Peter Woods.

Two years later, Content Mason and Peter Wood had another son, and Mason continued to live with the excommunication over her. As she aged and her children grew, the censure lingered. On May 25, 1712, the fifty-three-year-old Mason returned to the Dorchester church and confessed to her sins, after which the church rescinded her excommunication. And almost twenty years to the very date she ran away, Mason watched Reverend John Danforth marry her grown up daughter Eleanor Wood to Comfort Foster, a man from a good-standing family. Mason did not reenter the church simply to have her daughter married. If so, she could have merely had the censure removed. But Mason continued to work to become a visible saint, and on June 1, 1728, the Dorchester congregation propounded her for full communion.

Scholars chronicle the rise of the individual in relation to men in the public sphere: economic self-interest, voting status, and property. Yet, within the Puritan church, congregations encouraged women to view themselves as individuals. Censure practices reinforced the process of self-examination, introspection, and self-awareness in women. In 1712, Mary Quinsey offered a confession of faith to her Braintree congregation. She offered her obedience and faith, and desired "to be sensible how evil and bitter ye thing sin is," and prayed that "I hope I can truly say I am sick of sin and desire to loath and abhor myself." She committed her body and soul to God, "humbly hoping . . . in his mercy and favor and giving up my self absolutely to him and being resolved through his grace to depend upon him and upon him alone for all supplies of grace."[103] Her confession of faith resembled many female censure confessions and ministerial sermons that focused in individual piety. The colonial goodwife examined herself as an individual in relationship to her church. The sense of self had important ramifications. Women used a verbal form that validated their concepts of the self and their identity as an individual in a relationship with God.[104] Their individual piety defined their religious identity. Thus, women were integral in the creation of a religious self.

Puritan theology emphasized the individual soul. Sacvan Bercovitch explains that the reform ideology rested on "the principle of sola fides: which removes the center of authority from ecclesiastical institutions and relocates it in the elect soul." Writing about the Puritan view of the self, Bercovitch asserts that "Protestantism shift[ed] the grounds of private identity from the institution to the individual."[105] The Puritan concept of

[103]Mary Quinsey, Confession of Faith 1712/13, ms., Quincy Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

[104]For a discussion of verbal forms, see Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power*, xvi, 32.

[105]Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1975), 10–11.

piety required a focus on the individual. Theodore Dwight Bozeman concludes that "this new piety had a strong individualist thrust."[106] Kai Erikson notes how Puritanism "generated both a respect for individual freedom and a need for external discipline."[107] In the patterns of daily lay practices, women created an identity of self.

For the first two generations in New England, religion stood at the center of public life. Religion influenced public affairs, and New Englanders enforced the "godly way" in their congregations, town halls, and courtrooms. However, by the end of the seventeenth century, religion lost its public power and became a private institution. Some historians have discussed this as a religious declension. Yet, the church's loss of public power does not mean there was a decline in religion. Women continued to pour their energies into their churches and seek membership. Men continued to express their religiosity through civic duty because it had been reinforced by fathers and grandfathers. Other forces certainly contributed to pulling men into the secular world: increase trade, shifts in public power, the political climate, and commercial enterprise.[108] Puritan censure practices pushed men into worldly matters by stressing their covenanted responsibilities to the community and civic affairs. Men's religious identity was not tied to the meetinghouse or church membership, but could be expressed through their public service.

Historian Nina Dayton asserts that a sexual double standard emerged at the end of the seventeenth century as commercial interests and secularization drew men away from the household and created different public and private spaces for men and women.[109] However, it was not merely secularization that influenced such a shift. The daily practice of Puritanism itself, through lay censures and discipline, also contributed to this separation. By emphasizing public duty over personal piety, Puritan laymen contributed to the process that took men from the meetinghouse to the civil world. Women maintained their strong connections to the church, comprising two-thirds of church members by the eighteenth century. For three generations within the church, women gained a sense of individual identity and moral authority. Yet, as the church lost public power at the turn of the century, women's authority was relegated to the private sphere of church and home.

[106]Bozeman, *Precisianist Strain*, 106.

[107]Erikson, *Wayward Puritans*, 53.

[108]See Cornelia Hughes Dayton, "Taking the Trade: Abortion and Gender Relations in an Eighteenth-Century New England Village," *William and Mary Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (January 1991), 19–49.

[109]See Cornelia Hughes Dayton, *Women Before the Bar: Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut, 1639–1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 9.

By 1724, the civil courts shifted their focus from the godly community to a more commercial social order. Cornelia Dayton explains that at the end of the seventeenth century, the courts adopted more protocol from English law.[110] With the Act of Toleration of 1691, the churches lost public power and the courts did not hear the same types of moral transgression cases. And, when they did, they upheld the law or legal contracts more than Puritan prescriptions. The fissure between religious and civil authority separated the world of politics and commerce from the ecclesiastic world of piety and worship. It secularized the godly mission of the city on the hill.

In 1724, Reverend Timothy Edwards, the first minister of East Windsor, found himself in a difficult situation. His niece, Abigail, married John Moore, Jr., a man of reputed bad character. Abigail's parents and the minister were greatly alarmed and appeared before a council of ministers to find out what they could do. The ministers ruled that "By the best light we have from the word of God and according to the concurrent Judgement of Learned Judicious and approved divines, we judge that the father hath a right or power to make void such contracts." The Edwards family even had Abigail write a letter stating that she was afraid Moore would kill her if she turned him down and that she did not have the conscience or power to get married without her parents' permission. She asked the court to "set her at liberty," thus restoring the order of family government. The Edwards family invited seven men from the community to testify to Moore's character.[111] However, the court's priority of godly family government and Puritan hierarchy had changed. They honored the contract of the marriage over the words of the repenting Abigail, the disreputable behavior of Moore, or the precedence to honor family government. Later, when one of Edwards's parishioners married a woman without her parents' permission, Edwards refused to allow him to own the covenant without a confession. Edwards charged the young man, Joseph Diggens, with breaking the fifth and eighth commandments. Maintaining that his actions and behavior were within the law, Diggens counter-charged Edwards with mis-administration of authority. When the courts parted from their Puritan origins, they relegated the church to a private space, without public authority or power. The church no longer had a civil arm protecting the Puritan ideology.

When Windsor's minister Samuel Mather wrote a "Discourse Concerning the Difficulty Necessary of Renouncing our Own Righteousness" in 1698 (published in 1707), he dedicated it to the people of Windsor in "the service of their souls." He lamented, "We do not walk with god as our Fathers did, and hence we are continually from year to year, under his rebukes one way

[110]Dayton, *Women Before the Bar*, 9–13.
[111]Stoughton, *Windsor Farmes*, 71–72.

or other." He mourned the secularization of the courts and other forms of public life.

By the third generation, as women dominated church membership, ministers of this generation developed an intense focus on piety. Hall cites that by 1692, Cotton Mather was "arguing for a renewal of the covenant, looked not toward the state, but voluntary groups and individuals." Middlekauf explains that Cotton Mather was not concerned with social change in New England, but about an individual's preparation for the Second Coming. "In Cotton Mather terms, the truly introspective man would examine the fruits of faith or the signs of the process of convertion . . . the critical feature of self-awareness was not to leave any faculty of the soul unexamined."[112] In his history of New England, Cotton Mather believed the future of New England depended upon working on the souls of people.[113]

Richard Mather's other grandson, Samuel Mather, urged his congregation in Windsor to do the necessary "heart work." He did not discourse on the covenant, but upon an individual struggle of piety. "Our hearts are so deep that we cannot see to the bottom of them; there we may see one deceit under another, and another still under that . . . so that we have need to be much in searching our hearts." He urged people to "labour to find out this Evil in your selves, and mourn under it."[114]

Some historians have referred to this third generation emphasis on piety as a feminization of the church. However, Ann Braude contends that "it is the temporary gender equity characterizing some first generation Puritan churches, not the development of a predominantly female laity, that departs from American norms." She argues that declension addresses the issue of male focus rather than the loss of religiosity. Braude explains that "because women are viewed as the less powerful half of society, their numerical dominance is interpreted as a decline in power for a religious institution."[115] Religion did not decline in the eighteenth century. Women continued to seek membership. And although male membership declined, they entered the public sphere infused with a religious sensibility that stressed public duty. Puritans gendered their religion, which led to different forms of religious expression and identity for men and women.

The Puritan mission in New England had the potential to alter radically traditional gender rules. The emphasis on spiritual equality and the equal

[112]Robert Middlekauf, *The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals, 1596–1728* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 230.

[113]Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana, or The Ecclesiastical History of New England*, 2 vols. (Hartford: Silus and Son, 1853–1855), 655.

[114]Samuel Mather, *Discourse Concerning the Difficulty and Necessity of Renouncing our Own Righteousness* (Boston: J. Draper, 1698), 8, 48.

[115]Braude, "Women's History Is American Religious History," 93–96.

expectations for men and women to fulfill the covenant could have undermined the gender hierarchy and ideology. Puritans did not reach that challenge. But, with their emphasis on feminized piety, they did give women status and value. A pious woman exemplified what ministers expected of a visible saint. Women's religious ethos empowered them to see themselves as pious individuals. As such, they fostered the idea that women had value and important moral authority to offer their world. The seventeenth-century goodwife, passed on to her daughter and granddaughter a religious mentality that encouraged women as spiritual individuals and tied their religious experience to membership in the church. Mary Quinsey's great-great-niece, Abigail Adams, called for a greater public role for women after the Revolution. Adams could easily utilize the language of individual freedom and rights because for over 130 years, New England women saw themselves as religious individuals. Leslie Lindenauer contends that women's impetus for action in the eighteenth century stemmed from their seventeenth-century religious roots as "soldiers of Christ." Women refashioned their godly mission.[116] Their beliefs that they should play a public role also stem from their ability to see themselves as individuals, as spiritually autonomous beings who could act on their faith.

The male transition into the public world cannot simply be understood as secularization. Their own sense of religious identity also pushed them into the public world and reinforced a religious expression of duty and service. It was easy for Revolutionary era men to infuse their political goals with a religious message because, since disembarking the Arabella in 1630, men tied their religious identity with their civic duty. Robert Spur faced a number of civil and ecclesiastical censures in his life. While the senior Spur worked to regain his status in the church, his son, Robert Junior, and his grandson, Robert Spur, would both focus on their civic responsibilities. Robert Junior became a selectman, constable, and justice. Grandson Robert Spur became a captain, also serving as selectman and constable.[117] The Spur family exemplifies how Puritan men recreated their religious identity through the course of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries by transferring their religious ethos to the civil community.

Both Robert Spur and Content Mason lived to the age of ninety-eight, both dying with nearly a century of effort to work out their piety. How their sons, grandsons, daughters, and granddaughters identified themselves and related to their religion and their communities had a great deal to do with how the previous generations worked through the errand in the wilderness.

[116]Leslie Lindenauer, *Piety and Power: Gender and Religious Culture in the American Colonies, 1630–1700* (New York: Routledge, 2002), xvi.

[117]Hope, ed., *Records of the First Church of Dorchester*, 27, 29, 231.

Table I.

	Drunkards			
	Women	Men	Total	
1630–1660	1	8	9	
1661–1690	5	38	43	
1691–1725	5	22	27	
Total	11	68	79	
	Fornicators			
	Women	Men	Couples	Total
1630–1660	2	0	1	3
1661–1690	20	3	1	24
1691–1725	45	10	12	67
Total	67	13	14	94
	Other Sexual Offenses (Includes lasciviousness, unclean and scandalous behavior, and adultery)			
	Women	Adultery	Men	Adultery	Total
1630–1660	2	0	1	0	3
1661–1690	6	0	6	4	16
1691–1725	2	5	3	0	10
Total	10	5	10	4	29

Includes Congregations in: Dorchester, Boston First, Boston Second, Windsor, Salem, Wareham, Charlestown, Westfield, Roxbury, Salisbury.

Table II.

	Church Sins (includes dishonoring God, withdrawing, blasphemy, suicide)		
	Women	Men	Total
1630–1660	0	7	7
1661–1690	6	21	27
1691–1725	4	9	13
Total	10	37	47
	Speech Sins (includes slander, lying, false charges, cursing)		
	Women	Men	Total
1630–1660	1	10	11
1661–1690	4	20	24
1691–1725	13	8	21
Total	18	38	56
	Carriage/Disorderly Conduct		
	Women	Men	Total
1630–1660	1	5	6
1661–1690	3	11	14
1691–1725	1	3	4
Total	5	19	24

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001599 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table III.

Vice
(includes dancing, gambling, entertaining sin & company, fortune telling)

	Women	Men	Total
1630–1660	1	2	3
1661–1690	2	6	8
1691–1725	2	4	6
Total	5	12	17

Commerce/Civil Matters
(includes stealing, debt, fighting, property damage, idleness, failure of duty)

	Women	Men	Total
1630–1660	4	7	11
1661–1690	1	27	28
1691–1725	2	7	9
Total	7	41	48

Unknown Sins

	Women	Men	Unknown	Total
1630–1660	0	0	0	0
1661–1690	3	6	10	19
1691–1725	7	3	0	10
Total	10	19	10	39