



# **The Work of the Heart: Young Women and Emotion, 1780-1830 (Jeffersonian America)**

*Martha Tomhave Blauvelt*

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How did young American women construct and express their emotions between 1780 and 1830? Before Oprah and therapy, how did they reconcile society's demanding and often contradictory expectations? In *The Work of the Heart: Young Women and Emotion, 1780-1830*, Martha Tomhave Blauvelt looks to the often spirited diaries written by young women in America's early republic, arguing that the continuous, demanding, and often unnoticed emotional labor of women exemplified their uneasy position within society.

Employing the concept of "emotion work," Blauvelt argues that despite the fact that the amount of physical labor may have declined for these young women, the popularity of fiction, desire to display genteel refinement, need to deflect criticism of women's academy education, and resignation in marriage created multiple emotional tasks requiring highly skilled labor. In her detailed examination of fifty young northern women's diaries during this time period, the author shows that while this work entailed attempts at suppressing inappropriate feeling, it also invited self-consciousness and a sense of competence as these women addressed society's often contradictory expectations. In a variety of settings, emotion work was the means through which women constructed a fluid and negotiated self, while their diaries provided a mirror and tool of this labor.

Showing work where none seemed to exist, *The Work of the Heart* suggests emotion work as a key measure of women's status, whether for the twenty-first century or the eighteenth, and offers an analytical tool for historians exploring the self.

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