

**The Impact of Linguistics on Historical Interpretation: A Case Study
on Women in the Reformation**

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Abstract

This thesis examines how historians have written about women in the Reformation to determine how their values and assumptions about communication have shaped their interpretations. I use the sociolinguistic methodology of Deborah Tannen, which asserts that men and women have different fundamental ways of viewing and processing the world, and therefore communicating. By exploring the linguistic assumptions being made by historians, based on Tannen's theory, I will analyze the impact that has on historical interpretation first in the field of Women's Studies and then more specifically women in the Reformation. The same linguistic analysis will be used to examine the writings of female Reformer Katharina Zell (1498-1562), who provides a firsthand perspective of a woman living and writing during the Reformation. This study demonstrates the importance of historians' linguistic assumptions and argues that the values and communication styles of both men and women need to be present to gain a clearer picture of the past.

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I would like to thank Dr. Ellen Kittell and Dr. Richard Spence. As an undergraduate at the University of Idaho, they both inspired me to love history. Both of their classes were pivotal in my decision to become a history teacher and over my years of teaching I have often drawn on what I learned from them both academically and pedagogically. Their classes were the hardest and best classes I took as an undergraduate. As a graduate student, I had the privilege of again taking classes from both of them which I was thrilled about. The classes I took from Dr. Kittell started me down a path that brought me to this thesis. Without her, this would not have been possible. I am deeply indebted to her.

Dedication

Thank you, Sunny, for keeping me going throughout the process of writing my thesis. Your solidarity in the writing process and running ahead kept me moving when I wanted most to give up – I couldn't let you graduate without me after all. Thank you for the hours of writing alongside me, sharing resources on the Reformation, problem solving, and encouraging me to keep pushing forward. I am truly grateful. I also want to thank my family for the many words of encouragement and for supporting me throughout my entire education.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
Introduction.....	vi
Chapter 1: The Impact of Linguistics on Historical Interpretation.....	1
Rapport and Report Talk.....	4
Intimacy and Independence.....	9
Community and Contest.....	12
Chapter 2: Women in the Reformation Through Tannen’s Linguistic Theory	19
Those that Largely Leave Women Out	21
Reformation as Positive for Women	26
Reformation as Negative for Women.....	35
Women as Agents of the Reformation	45
Chapter 3: A Look at The Writings of Katharina Schütz Zell.....	51
Background and Historians’ Perspectives.....	51
Analyzing the Writings of Zell.....	56
Chapter 4: Conclusion.....	69
Bibliography	74

Introduction

I was having a conversation with my cousin and his wife about my thesis one evening. My cousin's wife asked me questions about what my thesis topic was and responded with words of encouragement telling me how interesting she thought it sounded. She asked clarifying questions and worked hard to relate to what I was writing about and show that she cared and was interested. My cousin, on the other hand, was silently clearing the dishes as we talked until I got to the point where I said "I am trying to prove...". He suddenly interrupted and said "No, you mean, what you're *going* to prove!" I laughed and agreed with him changing my sentence to "What I'm going to prove is..." I was struck by the conversation at the time because of how remarkably different their responses were to my explanation. They both care deeply about me and were genuinely interested in my thesis, but their ways of communicating it were very different. My cousin-in-law showed her support and belief that I would do a good job and complete it by engaging in conversation, relating to what I was saying and indicating that she thought my topic was interesting and worth writing. My cousin, on the other hand, demonstrated his care by listening until he heard something he thought required sharpening. His encouragement pushed me to make a bolder statement and not dilute my claim.

As I have gone through the process of writing my thesis, I have noticed similar differences in the way male and female friends and relatives communicate. Men, like my cousin, provided some sort of pushback and emphasized the importance they saw in me being able to solidly prove my point, almost as if my thesis were part of some sort of competition. But the motive behind their comments was not criticism, but rather meant to help and encourage me. The women I talked with, on the other hand, generally provided

encouragement with some version of “I would love to read it when you’re done!”.

Occasionally this was followed up by their own study in the area or reasons why they are also interested in my topic. Throughout this process I realized how much I valued having both types of interactions. The women I talked with provided encouragement by giving me a space to talk about my thesis and share what I was excited about or had learned from it. At the same time, the men in my life who demonstrated they believed I was capable of solidly proving my point and not needing to couch my arguments pushed me to make bolder statements and keep working to make the arguments I wanted to make. Communication differences of this sort are not only present in our modern lives, but in the lives of those who lived in the past.

Historians interpret the language of the past and then must use language to convey their research in a meaningful way. They are required to make decisions about how to interpret the words of those in the past and at the same time communicate those interpretations in the language of the present. Therefore, when studying history, it is vital to at least understand the linguistic assumptions being made by the writers of the primary sources and the historians interpreting those voices. In this thesis, I use Deborah Tannen’s sociolinguistic methodology, which argues that men and women perceive the world differently and therefore have different primary concerns and ways of communicating.

It is standard practice in the field of history to write historiographies and present what others have said about one’s topic, including the historians’ time period, in order to place them within their historical context. However, little consideration has been given to the linguistic assumptions made by those same historians. It could dramatically improve the writing of history if historians made it standard practice to also include an outline of their

linguistic assumptions. Drawing on Tannen's theories of communication, I examine how historians have written about Women's Studies. In a field of study where gender is at the forefront, a linguistic theory about gendered communication is particularly relevant. I then narrow my focus and explore how historians have interpreted and written about women in sixteenth century Reformation Germany. The interpretation of women in the Reformation has shifted significantly due to feminist historians which makes it an excellent case study to apply Tannen's sociolinguistic lens. I will not be uncovering some sort of hidden history – I am not discussing the discovery of new material but simply analyzing the way in which linguistics has shaped historical interpretation.

However, I do not end my study with just the analysis of other historians. Instead, I use the same sociolinguistic theory to analyze the writing of the Reformer Katharina Zell (1498-1562). I chose her because she did not come from the elite and yet wrote a significant number of published works. This puts her in the unique position of providing the opinions of a common person who reached a relatively wide audience, making her an important figure to read when considering the Reformation's impact on women. I will analyze Zell's writings using Tannen's linguistic theory on communication to provide a comparison between other historians writing about Zell and my own approach. This analysis of not just the secondary sources, but also the primary sources provide a deeper look at the shaping role linguistics plays in interpretation at every level of historical writing.

Linguistics is easily overlooked in the field of history. Although it shapes every part of a historian's job, since we all communicate through language daily, it can be easy to assume that we do not have to dig any deeper into linguistics in order to be an effective historian. However, linguistics and the way humans process information are incredibly

complex, which can leave huge disparities in the way information is being interpreted. Our own assumptions and way of processing can and will dramatically shape our interpretations. Analyzing all this and being aware of those linguistic assumptions will make for better historical writing. This work is neither a traditional history thesis nor a traditional linguistics thesis. Instead it represents an interdisciplinary study that allows us to combine the knowledge of experts in two fields to better understand the past.

Chapter 1: The Impact of Linguistics on Historical Interpretation

The words historians choose in communicating about history, and the linguistic assumptions they make when interpreting primary sources have a dramatic impact on the way history is told. The complexities of the interaction between linguistics and historical interpretation are examined in the writings of the British linguist Roy Harris. In his book *The Linguistics of History*, published in 2004, Harris argues that history cannot be written without using linguistics because it is communicated through language and historians should therefore interpret history with a closer eye on linguistics. He argues that because writing history requires the compilation and use of various forms of communication, linguistics is an essential part of it.¹

Harris provides useful insight into how integrating linguistics into the writing of history would be beneficial. Criticizing historians, he argues that they have largely left linguistics out of their interpretations of history, but in order for language to be precise, he argues, historians need specific definitions for their terms. They need to be forthcoming about the linguistic assumptions they are making. While acknowledging that many historians somewhat address the relationship between history and linguistics, he argues that they do not do so adequately, considering the importance of linguistics in shaping how history is written and told.² Primary accounts and historians' writing in any given period will automatically come with assumptions that fit specifically with that time period. The voices of the past are shaped by their culture and the language and assumptions of that period. Likewise, historians

¹ Roy Harris, *The Linguistics of History* (Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 1.

² Harris, 13.

are influenced by the language and assumptions of their own as well as the assumptions they have about the period they are writing about. When discussing these difficulties, Harris points out that “every format in which the past is reported has corresponding strengths and weaknesses which account for certain inclusions, omissions, and emphases.”³ Being conscious of those strengths and weaknesses will give us a clearer picture.

Most historians are honestly endeavoring to convey an accurate and unbiased interpretation of history by attempting to find the “truth” of what happened. However, Harris takes issue with the whole idea that there is one perfectly accurate lens or perspective to represent history. He argues instead that there is no single lens that allows us to fully understand what happened in the past and therefore the more honest way to represent history is for historians to understand linguistics and then be forthcoming with their audience about how they are selecting their sources and what linguistic assumptions are being made.⁴ Harris is clearly writing about history through the eyes of a linguist, but the dearth of historians actively engaging with linguistic theories speaks to the accuracy of some of Harris’s critiques.

Conversations shape both the present and the past. The way historians interpret those conversations drastically changes the historical narrative. Deborah Tannen, Professor of Linguistics from Georgetown University, has done significant work on the way men and women communicate and the motivating forces behind that communication. In her book *You Just Don’t Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, Tannen argues that men and women tend to approach conversation in fundamentally different ways. Men are primarily

³ Harris, 177.

⁴ Harris, 223.

motivated by a desire for status and independence whereas women are primarily motivated by a desire to establish and maintain connection and intimacy.⁵ While Tannen is writing in the context of modern human interactions, the same ideas can be applied to historical interpretations since historians are writing about the interactions and assumptions of people in the past while making their own linguistic assumptions in the present.

To be sure, it is important to not overgeneralize any of her arguments. The general patterns of behavior I will be discussing do not, of course, cover every person in every situation. However, because communication is fundamental to understanding humans and their interactions, it is a useful device for analyzing historians' work. This linguistic tool is especially important when looking at the study of gender because it is impossible to completely remove oneself from the issue. If Tannen is correct in her argument that men and women have different assumptions and motivations driving them, historians have innate biases when it comes to gender that they may not even realize. Therefore, analyzing those biases and assumptions when it comes to communication is essential, which can be seen in my analysis of gender studies and the Reformation. I have structured my argument from the general to the specific. I will first apply Tannen's theory to historians writing about women's history before moving on to women in the Reformation and then the writings of Zell.

Since women's history is a relatively new area of study, the works included here are from the 1970s on, with one exception. Vera Brittain, a female writer reflecting (in the 1930s) on her own experiences during the period surrounding and including the First World War, is included to provide an example of historians' interpretations before the field of study

⁵ Time does not permit me to fully cover Tannen's arguments here, so I have summarized what I believe are the most relevant arguments.

formally existed. I also examine at least one source on women's history from each decade beginning in the 1970s to provide a wide sampling, including historians such as Sarah Pomeroy and Gerda Lerner. By including historians writing about a variety of topics within Women's Studies, I am able to demonstrate the usefulness of Tannen's theories in a wide range of historical contexts. This chapter lays the foundation for the application of Tannen's theories on communication particularly in an area of study focused on gender.

Tannen's arguments essentially break down into three categories, rapport and report talk, intimacy and independence, and community and contest.⁶ As I examine historians in the field of women's history and then more specifically women in the Reformation, I use Tannen's lens, noting where they support and break from her theory.

Rapport and Report Talk

Tannen categorizes most talk into two categories: "rapport talk" and "report talk." Rapport talk is more common among women; it generally occurs in more private settings and, as the name indicates, is focused on building relationships. This manifests itself in women trying to emphasize their similarities and shared experiences. Women also tend to use this type of conversation even in public, which is why women often mix personal talk with business. On the other hand, "report talk" is more often used by men to maintain their status and independence. Men commonly exhibit their knowledge and skills through storytelling or

⁶ Deborah Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (London: Virago Press, 1993), 26, 76, 149.

even joking.⁷ Like “rapport talk,” this is a style of conversation, so it can occur both in public and private life although it is more common in public life. Both types of conversations are negotiations, but one for status and the other for closeness.

In order to gain a better picture of what this looks like, let us first examine a sampling of historical podcasts. While podcasts are not typically considered scholarly, and are therefore not the center of my argument, I believe they are useful in demonstrating the differences in communication that Tannen discusses. They are relevant because many people use podcasts to learn history, so they reach larger audiences than most scholarly works. Likewise, the same underlying linguistic assumptions can be seen in both adding depth to my argument. While I will return to them later in order to discuss their content, examining their delivery style provides some illustrations of Tannen’s argument and will lay a helpful base when observing how historians interpret communication. Podcasts are particularly important to examine because the delivery method is automatically conversational and therefore it is easier to see the historian’s assumptions and understanding of communication. I investigate a variety of podcasts, all dealing with Women’s Studies, that illustrate different aspects of Tannen’s theories. The podcast *Stuff You Missed in History Class*, which began in 2008, is written and hosted by two women: Tracy Wilson and Holly Frey. They present the facts in a collaborative way and insert personal anecdotes into their podcasts. In the episode “The First Celebrity Chef: Marie-Antoine Carême,” they share some of their own cooking habits alongside telling the history of Marie-Antoine Carême. Similarly, *The History Chicks* podcast, started in 2011, was created and cohosted by two women. Beckett Graham and

⁷ Deborah Tannen, *You Just Don’t Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, 77.

Susan Vollenweider, who discuss both real and fictional women throughout history, make it clear that they love to talk. This comes out in their podcast since it is structured as a conversation. They do not debate the topics they are covering but complement and play off one another. The way they interact suggests that not every word in their podcast is scripted which gives it a comfortable feel as though you were sitting in on a friendly conversation. However, it results in various personal rabbit trails throughout their episodes. This does not produce an efficient podcast, but a conversational one. That is not to say that female historians cannot provide a more efficient look at history though.

Footnoting History, which first aired in 2013, was created by Elizabeth Keohane-Burbridge. While the hosts rotate, Keohane-Burbridge hosts the episode “Jessie Pope: (In)famous Poet of World War One” and presents her information at a no-nonsense rapid pace. Despite this strikingly different approach, Keohane-Burbridge still includes personal anecdotes. She begins the podcast by explaining how she first learned about Jessie Pope and the process she went through to discover more about her. By the end of the podcast, not only have you learned about Jessie Pope, but also about Keohane-Burbridge’s personal life. She included the fact that she is a history teacher and touches upon some of her teaching pedagogy. Because women tend to use rapport talk, Tannen claims that women feel the need to include more personal information in conversations even when it is business. That idea is clearly reflected in all three podcasts.

In contrast, podcasts hosted by men provide a very different type of communication, which seems to place more value on the knowledge being presented than on creating a

relationship with their listeners.⁸ Tannen argues that men view the transfer of information as the primary element of conversation and therefore assume that talk completely centered around technical information is foundational for a good conversation.⁹ *The Memory Palace*, which first aired in 2008, is written and produced by Nate DiMeo. In the episode “no. 116,842, focusing on the American inventor Margaret E. Knight [1838-1914]”, DiMeo never deviates from the historical story. He does add commentary and propose historical interpretation, but not his own personal anecdotes. Similar patterns can be found in *Revisionist History* created by Malcolm Gladwell and Pushkin Industries, which first aired in 2016. In the first episode “The Lady Vanishes”, Gladwell draws the audience in by taking a more conversational tone. He poses questions to his audience and even tells about how he visited the nineteenth century painting *The Roll Call* whose artist is the focus of the episode. Snippets of Gladwell talking with the Art Historian Desmond Shawe-Taylor are included, and Gladwell speaks of some of the research he has done, but it remains completely academic. He even references pop culture, bringing in the Beatles and Beyoncé, but again it is used as a comparison and we never get to know Gladwell’s personal life. This difference seems to reflect Tannen’s ideas that men see less value in discussing personal concerns and more on the knowledge being presented. The podcast hosts chose to present their material in a way which indicated the style and information they considered to be important.

⁸ Throughout this thesis, I will use the terms “value” and “values”. I am not using the term in a moral sense - what is right or wrong. Instead, my goal is to discuss what people place importance on and therefore how they perceive the world and what they notice.

⁹ Deborah Tannen, *You Just Don’t Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, 80.

The same can be said of how historians present and interpret historical communication in writing. Tannen argues that while men see conversation as a competition for status, women find more value in talking to create closeness and to express their feelings. The American historian Joan Kelly-Gadol reflects these assumptions of men and women's values and communication in her 1977 essay "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" Although she does not openly assert that she is using any linguistic theories, the language she uses and the actions she focuses on reflect Tannen's theories. When discussing literature and culture of the Middle Ages, Kelly-Godal argues that women played a vital role in shaping and spreading literature. For example, she claims Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter Marie are responsible for bringing literature and courtly love to England. Likewise, through their patronage they helped shape the literature of courtly love.¹⁰ In saying they taught and spread the ideas together, it implies that the two women collaborated as opposed to competing. Kelly-Godal is assuming that these women found value in communicating about feelings and creating community through spreading courtly love.

When Kelly-Godal discusses politics, she interprets men and women's actions completely differently. She uses words like, "claims of nobility" and "status" to describe men, assuming those are shaping characteristic for the men.¹¹ Alternately, when she discusses women of political power these descriptors are strikingly missing. For example, when speaking about Caterina Sforza, Kelly-Godal tells of Caterina's remarkable exploit of

¹⁰ Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 184.

¹¹ Kelly-Gadol, 185.

riding to put down a coup just a day before giving birth.¹² As astonishing as this story is, it is even more noteworthy that Kelly-Gadol states that Caterina took on the task because her husband was sick. Including that detail is significant to Kelly-Gadol's view on women because it raises the question whether Caterina was doing it for status, or simply out of her value for her relationship with her husband.

Intimacy and Independence

Tannen contrasts men and women's driving motivations by using the words "intimacy" and "independence".¹³ While she acknowledges that men and women need both, she argues that women tend to focus on creating intimacy with their word and actions while men strive for independence. For women, this means minimizing the appearance of hierarchy in a relationship and focusing on reaching a consensus. Men, on the other hand, value status and therefore desire independence in order to be the one giving orders instead of taking them. Tannen uses the example of decision making to elaborate on the difference. She notes that when it comes to decision making women tend to want to consult with their partner in order to reach a consensus and view that conversation as proof that their lives are connected with another, which shows their intimacy. On the other hand, men see the need to consult with their spouse as a sign of weakness or subordination. Tannen argues that when these two values come into conflict, women tend to choose intimacy while men tend to choose independence. She remarks, "It is as if their life-blood ran in different directions."¹⁴

¹² Kelly-Gadol, 186.

¹³ Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, 26.

¹⁴ Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, 26-31.

Joan Kelly-Gadol's analysis of men and women in the Middle Ages reflects this desire for intimacy and independence. She argues that in the Middle Ages, women had more social and political power than in the Renaissance, in part because it allowed men to maintain their social status. In one example, she claims that it was more socially acceptable for medieval women to have affairs and run estates in their husband's absence primarily for practical reasons. Barons often needed their wives' support to maintain control of their fiefs which took priority over ensuring the legitimacy of their children.¹⁵ This would imply that women were motivated by their relationships and intimacy while men were willing to overlook infidelity so long as their power was being maintained. Since legitimacy was not a primary concern, wives' affairs posed little threat to inheritance and by extension, the baron's status or independence. Whether knowingly or not, Kelly-Gadol assumes that men in the Middle Ages were primarily concerned with the practicality of maintaining their status and independence while women were interested primarily in their relationships.

To further demonstrate this difference in motivation and communication, it is useful to examine Vera Brittain's memories of WWI laid out in *Testament of Youth* which focuses on a historical moment with which most readers are more familiar. Brittain's memoir illustrates the nuances of my linguistic methodology applied not just to historians, but also to contemporary writers. As such, readers will be able to first follow the implications of my linguistic analysis before it is applied to Zell's case in the third chapter. While Brittain's approach does not explicitly mirror Tannen's argument, her work reflects the idea that the men in her life are shaped by a desire to prove themselves while women are primarily

¹⁵ Kelly-Gadol, 182.

motivated by connection. Brittain tells the story of how three young men, one of whom is her brother Edward, all volunteer to fight in WWI. She does not assume that men desire war inherently – quite the opposite, she frequently references her brother’s love for peace and assumes that this will make him a poor soldier. Instead, she is surprised when he proves to be an excellent soldier and is awarded the Military Cross. Similarly, after being sent to the front, her fiancé Roland writes to Vera that he does not feel any love for the Belgians nor any hate for the Germans. Like Edward he is not driven to war because he has a personal investment in it or enjoys the idea of war. Instead Roland says that his motivation is “heroism in the abstract”.¹⁶ Brittain recognizes that war provided an opportunity for the men to prove themselves.

Brittain herself is quite determined to assist the war effort. However, she presents her own motives very differently from those of her male contemporaries. Instead of being motivated by proving her loyalty and bravery, she is motivated by her relationships. While Roland is alive, she feels it is her duty to be a nurse so that she can feel nearer to him.¹⁷ In her nursing duties, Brittain voluntarily takes the worst and hardest jobs in her “eagerness to share Roland’s discomforts.”¹⁸ Both of these reflections indicate that Vera is making life-altering decisions not because of her desire to prove her own status, but because she believes it will enhance her relationships. Brittain does discuss the closeness of the relationship among the three boys which could have factored into their choice to all go to war. However, in their writings they never say that is the primary reason they went. Instead, they cite things

¹⁶ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2015), 129.

¹⁷ Brittain, 140.

¹⁸ Brittain, 246-247.

like heroism so if we take them at their word, status seems to be more significant than their relationships in the actual decision. While Brittain does not question the difference between her motivation and that of the men in her life, she does point it out which indicates that she is at least aware of the difference.

Community and Contest

Tannen argues that men approach conversation as a contest more than as an opportunity to cultivate a relationship.¹⁹ Men are interested in connection but do so through sizing up one another and determining what their place is in the hierarchical system.²⁰ Connection is established for men through the guise of opposition and ritual combat.²¹ On the other hand, women tend to be confused by agonistic displays of competition and assume that the aggression is real. They view communication as primarily a way to establish connection and their hierarchy is one of relationships. While women do sometimes compete, it is often done in more subtle ways.²² This difference in communication is evident not just in how authors are interpreting history, but also in the way they are approaching their topics. It could be argued that because of the argumentative nature of academia, it more readily reflects men's natural form of communication rather than women's communication.

¹⁹ Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, 76-77.

²⁰ Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, 130.

²¹ Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, 25.

²² Tannen argues that women's struggle for power comes out in things like gossip. Instead of outright aggression, women tend to tear one another down in order to gain power themselves through talk in community. Therefore, their power struggles are easily disguised to look like friendship and community.

Tannen alludes to this very idea in her article, “Agonism in the Academy: Surviving Higher Learning’s Argument Culture” published in 2000. In the article, Tannen argues that academia trains and rewards students to tear down arguments instead of building on the work of others.²³ While she does not explicitly tie her line of reasoning to her other work on communication, she argues that academia approaches the exchange of ideas as a “metaphorical battle” and uses words such as “criticize”, “attack”, and “triumph” which reflects the more contest-oriented approach of men. Likewise, she argues that academia would go further if academics were also encouraged to create, collaborate, and understand the work of others. Tannen does not argue that there is no place for criticism or competition, but instead argues that academia could make larger gains and attract a larger variety of people to the field if competing and tearing down was not the default and accepted practice.²⁴ In other words, if academia was not geared so exclusively towards men’s way of thinking and operating, but also incorporated women’s the field would expand in new ways.

Tannen’s lens reveals fascinating assumptions historians make about their own gender and that of the opposite. This impacts how they present their information and how they shape the academic discourse. Because men have had the primary shaping power in academia, the debate and competitive structure reflects that. As the study of women’s history has developed as an official area of study, women have had more of an opportunity to hear

²³ Deborah Tannen, "Agonism in the academy: surviving high learning's argument culture," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 46, no. 30 (2000): B7+. *Gale Academic OneFile* (accessed March 28, 2023), <https://link-gale-com.uidaho.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A61490226/AONE?u=mosc00780&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=3b98bdae>, 2.

²⁴ Deborah Tannen, "Agonism in the academy: surviving high learning's argument culture," 4.

one another's ideas across the years. Part of the impact of that is women historians challenging that system and proposing their own ideas for more collaborative atmospheres. This shift is readily understood in the light of Tannen's arguments.

In her book on the history of the women of ancient Greece and Rome, Sarah Pomeroy actively goes against the assumption that academic discourse must be argumentative. She acknowledges that she does not make solid enough claims for some readers, but she does so purposefully to provide the facts and not be hasty in her conclusion and criticizes other historians for doing just that. In criticizing other historians for being argumentative, Pomeroy bucks the entire assumption that academic communication ought to be competitive. Pomeroy also tries to be careful with her linguistic assumptions by not passing judgment on past women based on modern assumptions.

Pomeroy's 1975 book *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* is an early example of a female historian writing in a more collaborative and less competitive manner. Pomeroy is careful not to pass judgement on the social structures of the Greeks and Romans or to assume she understands the struggles or satisfaction in women's lives at the time. A consistent theme throughout her book is her care to not apply modern standards or mindsets to these past civilizations. After discussing the incredible limitations placed on Athenian women, particularly those of the upper class, she argues that we are in no place to judge those women's satisfaction with their lives or if they felt protected by the laws instead of discriminated against by them.²⁵ This makes it difficult to discuss Pomeroy's interpretation of communication since she is so hesitant to make clear interpretations.

²⁵ Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1995), 91.

However, that is, in itself, significant because it lays the foundation for the idea that academia need not be primarily competitive or debate-oriented in the manner often found in the writings of other historians writing on women's history.

Gerda Lerner, who helped found the study of women's history in academia, follows this same idea in one of her seminal works, *Creation of the Feminist Consciousness*, published in 1993. Lerner begins and ends her book with an explanation of what feminist consciousness is and how it is achieved. She emphasizes women's need for education and sisterhood to sharpen their ideas and form a unified voice against patriarchy. Lerner begins her analysis in the Middle Ages. She focuses on influential women such as Hrosvitha of Gandersheim and Hildegard of Bingen in order to illuminate how they shaped history and in doing so, reflect the beginnings of what she calls "feminist consciousness". This consciousness, Lerner argues, required women having the opportunity to collaborate and build off one another. Education provided this opportunity. Lerner notes that the all-girls schools, first formed in the seventeenth century, provided women with both education and a life-long network of like-minded women. From this network where women were given the chance to have safe conversations and test their ideas, Lerner argues the nineteenth-century women's suffrage movement emerged, which was pivotal in creating the feminist consciousness. Lerner is clearly operating under the assumption that for women's ideas to be fostered, they require a collaborative atmosphere where they are encouraged to share their ideas. It is noteworthy that Lerner does not argue for a place where women can actively debate topics, but rather that they needed a safe collaborative space in order to push their ideas forward.

Ellen Kittell, a professor of history, specializing in the fields of pre-modern Europe and women's history, makes similar arguments on women in academia. In her article, "Patriarchal Imperialism and the Narrative of Women's History," Kittell reflects Tannen's argument in the way she presents how the current academic discussion is framed. Kittell implies that the framework and general expectations in academia are created from men's natural tendencies and ways of thinking. She notes that after historians have introduced the historical narrative, they lay the framework for the current debate surrounding the issue.²⁶ There is an underlying assumption that for academic discussion there is only value in something that can be debated and not just discovered or explained. Kittell implies that the idea of debating instead of discussing or collaborating over history is heavily influenced by men when she references an experience she had while presenting her research. She notes that a male in the room asked her to frame her research in regard to the historiographical debate and would not accept her response that there is not real debate around her research at this point.²⁷ This inability to view research as valuable for the sake of knowledge reflects Tannen's argument about the different priorities men and women have in communication.

Female historians value collaboration and promote the idea of community over competition in academic discourse as well as in the historical interpretations and values they promote. Perhaps one of the best exemplars is Raine Eisler's *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*, published in 1987. In it, Eisler focuses on the relationships between

²⁶ Ellen Kittell, "Patriarchal Imperialism and the Narrative of Women's History" in *Narrative Power: Encounters, Celebrations, Struggles* (Dixon, MI: Thomson-Shore, Inc., 2010), 43.

²⁷ Kittell, 44-45.

men and women over the course of Western culture. Eisler bases her arguments on the assumption that competition is bad and creates devastation in the world, while women's focus on community is positive and, if made the standard, would create a peaceful and collaborative world. She argues that early on in human history the evolution of human society reached its height in an egalitarian society of goddess worshippers. Eventually however, this society was destroyed by the male-dominant, war-loving Kurgans, which began our devolution into patriarchy where "masculine" virtues were upheld.²⁸ To describe "masculine" virtues she repeatedly uses terms like power, war, and hierarchy. This connection is not surprising when considering Tannen's argument. However, unlike Tannen's, Eisler connects only negative attributes to "masculine" virtues. Eisler is arguing for a complete shift in our perspective and values as a society but fails to see male competition as worthwhile.

She also does not acknowledge that male competition can be ritualistic or build relationships. The shift in outlook that Eisler is promoting is essentially elevating the way women communicate and giving little merit to the way men communicate. Because of Eisler's paradigm, she argues that humankind can shape our future evolution to again adopt the egalitarian values of the past. However, this assumes that women's way of communicating is more evolved than that of men. Eisler is placing higher value on women's focus on community and disregarding men's interest in competition as barbaric. Likewise, she fails to recognize that women participate in power struggles as well, but often disguise it to look like community.²⁹

²⁸ Eisler, 44.

²⁹ Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, 76-77.

Understanding the difference between the way men and women communicate could dramatically alter the way historians interpret the past. Every historian has a plethora of factors that shape their interpretation, but communication is an element that is often overlooked. The historians' underlying values and motivations behind their communication guide how they interpret history. For example, Eisler's assumption that competition makes little sense, shapes her interpretation both of ancient civilizations and of how the world could work differently today. Tannen's arguments in many ways allow us to more readily see those underlying biases regarding genders. That, in turn, can help us better analyze historians' perspectives and interpretations. The assumptions historians make about communication will dictate what they consider significant and therefore emphasize, and what they leave out.

Chapter 2: Women in the Reformation Through Tannen's Linguistic Theory

The Protestant Reformation, which began in 1517 and continued through the 1600s was a period of religious upheaval and dramatic change in Europe. Because there is no unified body of Protestants, but instead widely varying sects, it makes evaluating the Reformation's impact on women difficult.³⁰ The goal of this chapter, therefore, is not to provide a comprehensive look at women in the Reformation, but instead to narrow the field to women specifically in Lutheran Germany where the Reformation began. The Reformation brought with it the theology of the priesthood of all believers, both men and women. Reformers rejected the idea of praying to saints and Mother Mary. Celibate priesthood was eliminated which meant that priests now had wives who often had special roles in the community. With the elimination of celibate priests, monasteries and convents were likewise closed and the men and women in those institutions were encouraged to marry. This led to a larger emphasis on the family unit. Reformers viewed marriage as a partnership for the purpose of companionship and raising children in the knowledge and fear of God. Laws on divorce and prostitution changed in cities that adopted the Reformation. All these changes in women's roles, status, and accepted occupations in society impacted women, but historians do not agree on whether it was a positive or negative change for women. Historians' answer

³⁰ Throughout this thesis, I will use the term "Protestant" for the sake of simplicity. However, there are many very different sects who all treat women differently. I will name some of those sects as they are brought up by the authors examined here, and I will use "Protestant" for simplicity and coherency despite the wide variety that falls under that term.

to that question is largely shaped by their underlying linguistic assumptions and cultural values.

For the present analysis, the historical interpretations fall into three distinct categories: those that leave women out, those that say the Reformation was positive for women and those that say it was negative. Before Women's Studies was a field, historians regularly overlooked the impact the Reformation had on women in Western society. Of the historians who do address the issues of women, there are two strikingly different interpretations. The older interpretation, represented by historians like Roland Bainton and Michael Walzer, is overwhelmingly that the Reformation was positive for women. The newer interpretation, supported by Lyndal Roper and Merry Wiesner, argue that the Reformation was actually very negative for women. The reason for this is not because some dramatic new discovery has been made, but more simply because the interpretation of the facts has generally shifted in large part because of feminist historians and a shift in the linguistic assumptions being made. I will here examine historians from the early twentieth to the twenty-first century in order to highlight that shift in interpretation.

The advent of Women's Studies in the 1960s followed by the formation of gender studies in the 70s and 80s, focused more attention on women's historical experiences and pushed historians to include them more explicitly in their writings. Likewise, the shift in ideas and values these movements brought shaped historians' interpretation of what "better for women" looked like. Earlier historians like Michael Walzer, writing in the 60s, seem to assume that most women would be part of a family unit and do not question the value of that. However, the feminist historian Lyndal Roper, writing in the late 80s and early 90s, argues that it is in fact this closer-knit family unit that is negative for women because it confines

women's choices and thus their agency. The shifting values of society are reflected in how the historians interpret the outcome of the Reformation on women.

While the study of women's history broadly shows how linguistics can shape interpretation and inform the direction of a movement, these patterns can be seen more specifically when examining historians writing about women in the German Reformation. In this case, the shift in historical interpretation is, in part, due to differing linguistic assumptions. The male historians examined here tend to be more focused on how the theology of the Reformation impacted women, why the movement succeeded, how it spread, and women's impact in the success of the movement. The female historians, on the other hand, write more about how women's community is enhanced or harmed through the Reformation. They are concerned with how the closing of convents impacts women's relationships and opportunities, and how close-knit families and the expectation of marriage might likewise impact women's opportunities for community. While both male and female historians fall on both sides of the argument, "was the Reformation good for women?", the older interpretation, that it was positive, is more influenced by what Tannen would label the "male" way of thinking, while the opposite is more influenced by the "female" approach. This makes women in the Reformation a particularly striking topic to apply Tannen's linguistic theories to.

Those that Largely Leave Women Out

Most books covering the Reformation that were published before 1970 have very little to say about women in the Reformation. Historians writing in the 1800s and early 1900s generally leave women out entirely only mentioning them in passing or discussing the wives

of significant Reformers. I examined seventeen books published before 1970 and none of them include women in either the table of contents or the index. On the other hand, twelve of the sixteen books published between 1970 and 2000 include women in their table of contents and/or index. In contrast, every book I found published in the 2000s includes women, and numerous articles on the topic have been published. This demonstrates a striking shift in focus and awareness of women as a distinct group that ought to be specifically addressed.

Similarly, the way historians have talked about women has changed over that time. For example, in 1914 the American historian and theologian Henry Vedder published *The Reformation in Germany*. While women are not referenced in the index, they are mentioned in passing a few times within the book. When Vedder is discussing Martin Luther, he includes a few sentences about Luther's wife. However, he only talks about her in the context of how impactful their marriage was to the Reformation and how it encouraged other clergy to marry. Nothing specific about Katharina von Bora is mentioned, and the only relational question included is whether Luther was happy in the marriage.³¹ The primary focus is clearly on the movement as a whole and not on the experiences of individual people. Similarly, American Protestant church historian Roland Bainton includes only brief acknowledgements of women in his 1952 book *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*. Like Vedder, he mentions Luther's beliefs on marriage and how he did not elevate the monastic life as Catholics did. Bainton ends his discussion by saying Luther was a good husband.³² This again brings in women only when discussing marriage in general or when

³¹ Henry C. Vedder, *The Reformation in Germany* (Macmillan, 1914), 253-258.

³² Roland Herbert Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (Beacon Press, 1968), 50-53.

referencing the wife of a specific reformer. However, by 1971, Bainton published a book entirely on women titled *Women in the Reformation in Germany and Italy* which I will address later.

This focus on the movement itself and the beliefs of only the leaders of the movement is reflective of Tannen's lens. It emphasizes the "male values" of tracking the successes of the movement instead of spending time reflecting on relationships or the community of people involved in the movement. While women are strikingly left out of these historian's works, so is any depth on how the movement impacted the common people. Instead, the focus is on the leaders (status), the conflict (competition), and how the Reformers managed to get the Reformation to take hold and spread across Europe.

The influence of feminist historians can begin to be seen in the field of the Reformation beginning in the 1970s. When examining these later works, we find that women are not always at the forefront, but they are usually more consciously included. American historian James D. Tracy provides a textbook overview of the Reformation in his book *Europe's Reformation, 1450-1650* originally published in 1999. It should be noted that Tracy's work is a survey text and should therefore be used as such.³³ Tracy's approach to the Reformation is more inclusive of women than is Walzer's, although it still lacks depth. Out of Tracy's three hundred and sixty-nine-page book, he devotes only a handful of pages to issues specific to women. He mentions several women by name such as Katharina Zell and

³³ Survey texts, by nature, provide limited space to everything they cover so it is unreasonable to expect women to be covered in-depth in a survey text about the Reformation. However, such texts provide a summary of current thought on the topic, Tracy's work is representative of the time period and therefore useful in tracing the shift in interpretation and focus.

Jeanne d' Albret and briefly discusses topics like changing family responsibilities and convents. Throughout the book he refers to the "men and women" of the Reformation but rarely does he address issues specific to women or even how the Reformation shaped women's lives in unique ways. This repeated use of the phrase "men and women" indicates a shift in thinking. Tracy is clearly attempting to include women not just as wives and mothers, but as active participants in the Reformation. However, the use of that phrase also succeeds in lumping their experiences together instead of looking at experiences unique to women. While Tracy does not speak in depth about women, his inclusion of women and the experience of common people during the movement indicates the influence of feminist historians. His focus is not primarily on the competition of the movement, but also more of the relational aspects of the movement.

Tracy's survey text naturally does not include enough information on women for him to make a clear argument on whether the Reformation improved or degraded women. However, it is interesting to note that whenever Tracy discusses improvements for people during the Reformation, he often includes both men and women. Tracy points out that worship services in the vernacular, including the sermons, Scripture reading, and hymns narrowed the gap between the rich and poor, but these sorts of comments are left gender neutral.

On the other hand, he does discuss a few ways in which the Reformation was specifically negative for women. He argues that it provided them with fewer religious choices since they were not allowed the choice of convents, and no longer had the task of "small devotional chores" that their Catholic counterparts had such as finding herbs and organizing the correct colors of candles for their family to bring to church on Candlemas day.

Moreover, the Virgin Mary and other female saints disappeared from the religious sphere.³⁴

Piecing those sections together, one can argue that Tracy views the Reformation as beneficial in some ways, but as mostly negative in areas specific to women.

Benjamin J Kaplan, Professor of Dutch History at University College London, is equally unilluminating in *Divided by Faith* when it comes to how the Reformation impacted women. Published in 2000, the book focuses on tolerance and how societies navigated living in mixed religious communities, so it is not surprising that Kaplan does not spend much time specifically addressing women or making an argument on the Reformation's impact on women. His focus on tolerance does not extend to how Protestants and/or Catholics dealt with women particularly those who broke the cultural norms. Although Kaplan does not go into any depth on women, he does consistently mention them throughout his book, showing he is consciously attempting to including women. For example, he discusses issues of mixed marriages and how women of different confessional orientations dressed, and he includes women from a variety of social classes, both those who ran households and those who were servants. He even notes that some Catholic women in England held secret church services in their homes which provided them with leadership roles that were unusual for the 1620s.³⁵ However, he does not provide enough detail either for him to make an argument about how the Reformation impacted women, or for his readers to draw any real conclusions of their own.

³⁴ James Donald Tracy, *Europe's Reformations, 1450-1650* (Lanham (Md.): Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 240.

³⁵ Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 185.

Those who leave women out, therefore, tend to fall into two categories. The earlier historians, reflect more of the male values by writing about how the Reformation succeeded and spread. Women are only referred to in passing when they relate to changes in theology or how they impact the success of the movement. However, for historians writing after 1970, even when women are not given significant time, there is an obvious attempt to include them, and more female values are present. The loss of female saints and the Virgin Mary for women to look up to is noted and there is more of a focus on how the Reformation impacted the lives of people instead of just focusing on the theology and how the movement was “won”. This reflects the significant impact of feminist historians.

Reformation as Positive for Women

Among those historians who do address women, the more traditional view seems to be that the Reformation brought changes that generally improved the lives of women, providing them with more equality. However, what historians focus on and how they present their arguments vary dramatically. Male historians tend to focus on hierarchy, independence, and displays of knowledge, while female historians tend to place more emphasis on community, relationships, and women’s experiences. Even when writing about the same situations or people, what historians choose to emphasize is fascinating to examine and appears to be influenced by their underlying linguistic assumptions.

A striking example of this is the historian Roland Bainton. While his earlier book, published in 1952, gives very little time to women, by 1971 he has written *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy*. Citing his earlier work on heretics, he explains that part of his reason for writing the book was because of his interest in those who are

underrepresented. He further argues that “women constituted a half of the population, and had they boycotted the movement, one may be sure that would have been the end.”³⁶ This focuses on women’s impact on the success of the movement. He likewise gives a third reason stating he wanted to “assess the impact of the Reformation on the social order” citing the Reformation as one of the most significant factors in shaping the family.³⁷ These last two reasons are striking when considering Tannen’s theory. Both reflect the idea of community and contest. While Bainton focuses his book on women, he is primarily concerned with how the movement was “won”. Similarly, he discusses the shift in family brought about by the Reformation in terms of social hierarchy.

Bainton does not clearly argue that the Reformation was either good or bad for women but his overview of women in the Western world indicates that he falls more in line with historians who argued for the positive which is why he is included in this section. He claims that while in Western culture, women’s place has traditionally been in the home, there have always been exceptions to that. He states that “to picture women in the West as in a continuous state of subjection is a gross exaggeration”.³⁸ Backing this up, Bainton lists famous women of the West from the Bible, the classic world, and the Renaissance.³⁹ Like

³⁶ Roland H. Bainton, *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy*, (Beacon, 1974), 9.

³⁷ Bainton *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy*, 9.

³⁸ Bainton, *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy*, 10.

³⁹ Bainton lists, among others, the Biblical women Esther, Rahab, Mary, and Martha. He also discusses goddesses and women from the ancient world such as Aspasia and Lucretia before moving on to famous queens like Cleopatra and Constantine’s mother Helena, and finally ends with women of the West like Hroswitha of Gandersheim and Henry IV’s mother Agnes.

later historians he notes that while confessions – both Protestant and Catholic - did not give women full authority to minister, they did have “orders of widows and virgins and deaconesses,” and that women were also martyrs, giving them significant roles in the church. Instead of seeing the loss of convents as negative, Bainton argues that in the late fifteen hundreds the opportunity provided women by convents was replaced by the opportunity to hold deaconess positions for helping the poor and sick. This lies in direct opposition to what more modern feminist historians argue when it comes to Western culture and the Reformation. While later historians will focus on the loss of community and self-determination brought about by the end of convents, it is important to note that Bainton instead focuses on what he argues are similar positions in society – that of nun and deaconess.⁴⁰ This again stresses women’s positional in the social hierarchy.

According to Bainton, social class, and not gender, determined opportunities for women during the Reformation. Citing examples of queens, he claims that Catholic and Protestant queens had equal influence, not because they were of a particular confession, but because they were already royalty.⁴¹ He argues women only had more opportunity in the Reformation as much as women in any revolutionary time period tend to have more opportunities. He sees them as temporary opportunities outside of traditional roles and not one that permanently changed due to the Reformation.

Bainton does attribute to women in the Reformation a legacy of courage and literacy. He says the largest impact the Reformation had on women and that women had on the church

⁴⁰ The “later historians” mentioned here will be addressed in the next section of my thesis.

⁴¹ Bainton, *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy*, 13.

is the translating, printing and distributing of the Bible, which inspired women to read. When discussing women's will to read and knowledge of the Bible, Bainton states that "even the comparatively uneducated, who appear in the martyrologies and the heresy trials, gave their judges a terrific run at any point involving the word of God."⁴² This portrayal of women is significant when looking at Tannen's theory. Bainton focuses on the moments when women "won" in verbal "battles". He applauds women for knowing their Bibles so well that they were able to show their superior knowledge to the judges they stood before. This reflects Tannen's theory that men find value in people exhibiting their skill and knowledge through "report talk".

The British historian Euan Cameron published *The European Reformation* in 1991 that includes a few pages on women where he claims that the Reformation allowed women religious outlets like writing religious pamphlets. He argues that Katharina Zell remained "one of a few lay people, male or female, who continued writing pamphlets after 1525" when the Peasants' War occurred.⁴³ Cameron chooses his words here and throughout his piece deliberately. Behind them, I would argue, is the belief that the Reformation benefits both men and women. Similarly, Cameron emphasizes the benefits of the Reformation for women by discussing how personal responsibility was encouraged in Protestant circles regardless of gender. Both boys and girls were catechized, and women were only required to submit to "godly commands". They might not be able to speak in church, but they could teach outside it. Certainly, Cameron argues that women were limited in some areas due to the Reformation such as some property rights being lessened, prostitution being banned – leaving women with

⁴² Bainton, *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy*, 14.

⁴³ Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 404.

large periods of abstinence, and limited alternatives to the positions found in convents. However, he claims that women's state was dependent largely on "family context, their own personalities, and those of their families".⁴⁴ While he argues that the Reformation benefited women, he maintains that family circumstances and status shaped a woman's historical experience more than did religion. Like Bainton, Cameron places significant weight on women's place in the social hierarchy. Similarly, he focuses on women's literacy and ability to speak and write publicly.

Like many historians, Cameron notes women's identities and spiritual lives were impacted by the closing of nunneries and convents, and the removal of female saints from religious life. However, instead of focusing on the loss that brought for women, he assigns positive motivations to the reformers when it comes to the changes they brought to women's lives. Cameron argues that reformers claimed that women in nunneries were subject to harsh treatment and had no spiritual independence, because those women were subject to male monastic overseers. According to Cameron, reformers further contended that women in nunneries were not respected as highly as married women and so by getting rid of convents, the reformers were actually rescuing the women not limiting their freedom or choices.⁴⁵ Cameron is cautious and does not fully agree with or discount the reformers' argument. Instead, he says that we cannot "tell whether women loathed or cherished the cloistered regime because they had protestant or catholic sympathies, rather than the other

⁴⁴ Cameron, 404-405.

⁴⁵ This topic is highly contested amongst historians. Later in this thesis I will be discussing historians who argue the exact opposite – that nunneries provided women with an independent and socially respectable position for women.

way around”.⁴⁶ In other words, while there is evidence that some women wanted to remain cloistered and others did not, we cannot fully know their motivation and how their religious beliefs shaped those decisions.

Cameron’s focus is notable in several ways. First, he focuses on the reasons offered by male reformers instead of looking at the writings of women themselves. His analysis and the reformers he focuses on both reflect Tannen’s theory. The reformers’ desire to help women gain the more “respected” position of marriage fits with the idea that men seek status and the respect of others. Likewise, it is noteworthy that Cameron emphasized the idea of women having no independence in nunneries while leaving out any comment about the community within nunneries.

It is important to observe that both Bainton and Cameron focus on women’s social status and see that as a more significant factor in their opportunities than any specific aspect of the Reformation itself. Their focus on social structures could be based on an underlying assumption that status – both economic and social – is the largest factor in shaping people’s lives. While some of the female historians addressed later mention social status and wealth in passing, it does not seem to hold the same weight in their minds as it does for these historians. Instead the female historians focus on the change the Reformation brought to women’s community and ability to make choices for themselves which will be examined later.

Similarly, James Anders, Professor Emeritus at the University of Calgary, portrays the Reformation as primarily positive for women. In his 2011 book *Daily Life During the Reformation*, Anderson focuses an entire chapter on “The Family,” where he writes

⁴⁶ Cameron, 403.

specifically about women. Like Cameron, he argues that the Reformers themselves were attempting to improve the lives of women but did not always succeed in practice. He points out that Luther viewed the family as under attack and that Luther's beliefs intended to benefit women. Luther claimed that convents isolated women and put them under the abusive authority of clergy.⁴⁷ Anderson states, "Reformers were determined that children would no longer be forced into a life of involuntary celibacy (some girls and boys went voluntarily) but that they should remain at home unless they married." Anderson's additions in parentheses, which happen throughout the chapter, indicates that while he believes Reformer's intentions were to improve the lives of women, he does not necessarily believe their perspective was accurate. Anderson also argues that educated Protestant women did not have the same opportunities outside the home that their Catholic women contemporaries did.⁴⁸

However, when it comes to marriage courts Anderson is unhesitant in his assessment of the changes brought about by the Reformation. He argues that unlike Catholics, who viewed marriage as a sacrament, Protestants allowed women to get out of abusive or even unloving marriages more easily.⁴⁹ Anderson uses only one specific example of a divorce case which includes an Italian wife who refuses to live in Geneva where her husband had moved and was therefore granted a divorce based on their separation.⁵⁰ Clearly his example is not that of an abusive husband which leaves many questions as to which sects or cases he is using to back up his claims. Vagueness aside, both Luther's and Anderson's arguments

⁴⁷ James Maxwell Anderson, *Daily Life During the Reformation* (Santa Barbara, Calif: Greenwood, an imprint of ABC-CLIO, 2011), 121-122.

⁴⁸ Anderson, 123.

⁴⁹ Anderson, 130.

⁵⁰ Anderson, 130.

reflect Tannen's categories of intimacy and independence because their claims about women center around the hierarchy of the world they lived in. Luther's arguments are focused on the abusive authority of clergy and rescuing women from that (which also reflects Tannen's argument about men's need to fix problems) and Anderson focuses on the abusive authority of a spouse.

Although still writing about the improvement to women's lives brought about by the Reformation, the American and Canadian historian, Natalie Zemon Davis uses a strikingly different argument. Davis specializes in researching and writing about those who are often overlooked. In her article "City Women and Religious Change", published in 1975, Davis writes about the experience of every-day women during the Reformation in France. While my focus is on Germany and Davis writes about France, many of the arguments and generalizations she makes apply to the Reformation in Germany and her reasoning is so different from that of the male historians that I am including her arguments. Davis claims that Calvinism improved the lives of women by allowing them more participation in religious life although this involvement did not leave men and women equal. Davis argues that while city women were not allowed to preach in public, they were allowed, for the first time, to actively participate in church services by singing alongside the men.⁵¹ Likewise, she notes that like men, women were encouraged to read the Bible for themselves and in some cases used their knowledge to persuade others and publish writings. In focusing on women participating in religious life alongside men, Davis reflects Tannen's argument that women value connection

⁵¹ Natalie Zemon Davis, "City Women and Religious Change," in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 65-95, 86-87.

and intimacy. Davis focuses little on the hierarchy of Protestant life and instead focuses on the shift in men and women worshipping and reading alongside one another.

Davis tells the story of Marie Dentière, who left her monastery, got married, and began to attempt to persuade other nuns to do likewise. Dentière published two works and in them argued that if God has revealed something to a woman, she must tell others about it. Davis uses this to demonstrate the larger voice women had because of the Reformation. It is interesting to note that Dentière's justification for preaching was relational in nature. Instead of arguing that she is theologically right, Dentière argues that God communicated with her and she is therefore obligated to share it. This argument seems to reflect Tannen's category of community and contest. Instead of focusing her energy on proving she is right, Dentière focuses on her relationship with God and the obligation she has flowing out from that. This is strikingly different from Bainton's focus on women using their voice to prove their knowledge during heresy trials.

Davis is not blind to the restrictions still placed on women during the period between 1500 and 1700, and notes that "[a]s it turns out, women suffered from their powerlessness in both Catholic and Protestant lands..."⁵² However, Davis's overarching argument is that women's lives were improved. Women had an increasing ability to participate in church services, read Scriptures for themselves, write and publish ideas, and in some cases publicly question the pastors of their church.

The inclusion of women as a focus of study within the Reformation shows the influence of feminist historians. However, the overarching narrative that the Reformation was positive for women reflects mainly what Tannen considers male values. The focus on

⁵² Davis, 94.

theology, how the movement was won, and the knowledge faithful women were able to demonstrate are all characteristic of male communication. They reflect a concern with status, rapport talk, and competition. The female historians, who make the same claim, use very different evidence to do so, but are the minority in this category. The difference in the arguments brought up by Cameron, Anderson, and Bainton versus those put forward by Davis demonstrate this.⁵³ However as female historians gained more influence in the field, the argument surrounding women in the Reformation shifted dramatically.

Reformation as Negative for Women

While older historians tended to either ignore women or see the Reformation as a positive force on them, feminist historians writing in the 1970s and later tend to view it as largely negative. They view the Reformation as limiting to women primarily because of fewer choices outside the home. They also put significant emphasis on women's sexual status – that of being a wife or virgin. However, like Davis, the female historians examined here emphasize women's community, relationships, and experiences which all reflect Tannen's theories.

Lyndal Roper is one of the most important historians proposing this alternate interpretation. An Oxford University professor of history, Roper has written extensively on the ideas of women and the Reformation. In her biography on the Oxford University website,

⁵³ It is not fair to generalize that male historians only make arguments about hierarchy and status while female historians will always make arguments based on relationships. Male and female historians will inevitably include aspects of both in their thinking and writing. However, analyzing the language and emphasis placed on those type of interactions can reveal interesting and helpful patterns.

Roper states that her areas of interest are “Luther and the Reformation, Gender History, and Sixteenth century German Art and material culture” so the fact that she has written two books on women and the Reformation is no surprise. Roper seems to be heavily influenced by other feminist writers in her arguments and interpretation of women in the Renaissance. In her 1994 book *Oedipus and the Devil*, Roper introduces her book with a historiography that includes an overview of feminist history and the use of gender as a historical lens, citing both American and German historians in her overview.

Roper’s other prominent work on women and the Reformation is *The Holy Household*, published in 1989. In *The Holy Household*, Roper discusses the Reformation and its impacts upon the city of Augsburg, Germany. She first lays the groundwork for how Augsburg operated before the Reformation to establish a baseline to compare the changes that occurred because of the Reformation. The Reformation, according to Roper, forced women to be seen almost entirely as wives and mothers and not as women.

Roper claims that her argument about women in the Reformation goes against the commonly held views of previous historians. Instead of arguing that the Reformation improves women’s lives, she argues that it strengthened patriarchy, thus giving women fewer options in society. She even goes so far as to argue that gender relationships were actually the central point of the Reformation and that its success revolved around Protestants message about women’s roles as wives in the household.⁵⁴ The fact that Roper sees relationships as a central aspect to the Reformation reflects Tannen’s arguments that women are more apt to see the significance of relationships. While male historians tend to write about how the

⁵⁴ Lyndal Roper, *The Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 5.

Reformation changed the power structure and even politics of the era, Roper focuses on the impact of shifting relationships.

For Roper, the significant shift in laws governing rape and prostitution were particularly harmful for women. She points out that while the Reformers in Augsburg, Germany did take rape cases very seriously and investigated both sides, the way the laws were written in 1537 began a trend of victim blaming. They included provisions on seduction which began to shift the burden of the crime onto women.⁵⁵ This naturally put women in a more vulnerable position. Roper cites one man who defended himself in court against a rape charge with the argument that the woman had a dishonorable reputation, so he did not think he was taking her virginity.⁵⁶ Similarly she argues that the Council's records indicate that there was a "pervasive distinction between sexually inexperienced virgins...and the sexually experienced, and hence voracious and dangerous, women who led men astray."⁵⁷ Therefore while rape cases were seriously investigated, women also had to prove they had not seduced the man.

Likewise, she argues that the shift in laws on prostitution also redounded negatively on women in general. The legally sanctioned city brothels that existed in Augsburg, for example, were tolerated as a lesser social evil. Under this system, prostitutes were seen as dishonorable people, but the Catholic church justified their existence by arguing that they were required to prevent worse evils.⁵⁸ The Reformation brought a shutdown of these

⁵⁵ Roper, 84.

⁵⁶ Roper, 84.

⁵⁷ Roper, 85.

⁵⁸ Roper, 100-101.

brothels. Prostitutes were no longer seen as merely dishonorable, but as evil temptresses, shifting moral blame onto women.⁵⁹ The Discipline Ordinance of 1537, for example, actually removes the category of prostitution and replaces it with simply adultery or fornication. The upshot of this shift in law was that men ceased being punished to the degree women were for prostitution.⁶⁰ Therefore, in the case of rape and prostitution, Roper argues the Reformation highlighted different standards for men and women.⁶¹ Likewise, Roper argues that while prostitution was not considered completely honorable, it was a legitimate vocation so the closing of brothels significantly limited women. While this argument does not clearly reflect one of Tannen's arguments, it does reflect a shift in values brought about by feminism. Historians writing before the advent of women's history did not bring up the legal decline of prostitution as a negative impact on women. Roper however, has no hesitation in arguing that prostitution was a valid vocation for women and therefore making it illegal removed a legitimate option for women outside the home. She goes so far as to call it an "early casualty of the Reformation".⁶²

Roper claims that the closing of convents has a similarly limiting impact on women. Without convents, women were stripped of a another alternative to marriage, thus limiting the type of acceptable work for women.²² Roper notes that not all women had a choice in

⁵⁹ Roper, 108.

⁶⁰ Roper 126.

⁶¹ Roper also notes that since it was commonly held that women had the strong sex drive, some Reformers argued that if the Catholic church's argument for brothels were true, they should also have male brothels. This does indicate some awareness on the part of the Reformers that a different standard was being applied to men and women.

⁶² Roper, 225.

whether or not they ended up in a convent but calls it “at least a theoretical choice for young girls.”⁶³ She strengthens the idea that the Reformation limited women’s choices by arguing that women were not only stripped of independent job opportunities but were likewise afforded no civic power.⁶⁴

Like Cameron, Roper acknowledges the role social status played in the lives of women although she places less emphasis on it overall. She notes that family and social status largely shaped which convents women ended up in and the positions they held in the convents. Roper argues that the Reformers saw convents as a threat because they undermined women’s place in society as wives and made them subject to ecclesiastical authority instead of city authority.⁶⁵ Roper acknowledges that both ecclesiastical and urban authorities exist, but seems to see city authority as more limiting than ecclesiastical authority. Regardless, Roper views male authorities as warring over who controlled women’s lives. In order for the Reformers to “win” they had to destroy the Catholic church’s authority over nuns and replace it with their own authority in the home. This ideology fits with Tannen’s theory that men compete and try to determine their place in the hierarchy. Roper sees this opposition as a sign of aggression and harmful to women. This is strikingly different from historians like Bainton and Cameron who attribute positive motives to the same actions. Bainton and Cameron see the conflict between reformers and church authorities as relationship building as the reformers try to protect women from what they perceive to be abusive authorities. Roper, on the other hand, sees the male competition as controlling and negative.

⁶³ Roper, 206.

⁶⁴ Roper, 252.

⁶⁵ Roper, 5.

When Roper describes convents, she focuses on the community and connectivity they provided for women. She states that nuns were “bound to a group of women by a vow which made them co-spouses and fellow-sisters”.⁶⁶ This reflects Tannen’s arguments that women value connection. Roper places value on the connection women had with one another within convents and assumes those connections were important to women of the time. Similarly, she argues that a convent’s hierarchy was better for women since it allowed women to vote and hold positions of power such as being a prioress. On the other hand, Roper argues that the Reformation limits women’s roles by not allowing women to have any authority and “denied them any role not contained within the household”.⁶⁷ Roper does not however address the idea that both nuns in convents and wives had male authorities above them.

Roper’s arguments about civil authorities taking control away from women however reflects Tannen’s arguments in attributing competitive motivations to the men of the era. It assumes that the men who made up those civil authorities felt a desire to “win” and assert dominance and, in cases where convents were largely ruled by women, they had no voice in that hierarchy which naturally prevented them from “winning”. Therefore, Roper’s focus on men asserting their dominance in dissolving convents even, in some cases, at the great expense of the city, reflects the assumption that men found a way to “win” in an area where they had previously not had the ability to do so.⁶⁸

Unlike Davis, Roper argues that even within the church, women’s lives are made worse by the Reformation. Instead of discussing women’s abilities to sing in church, she

⁶⁶ Roper, 206.

⁶⁷ Roper, 222.

⁶⁸ Roper, 219.

notes that there are no more all-female choirs.⁶⁹ Likewise, she argues that the male supervision that existed before the Reformation which required priests to supervise the women created a “kind of guarantee of attention from the male religious. Such a system valued and nurtured a specifically female style of devotion.”⁷⁰ This again places emphasis on the relationships women were able to build. She contrasts this by arguing that Protestant pastors had no such interest in developing women’s devotional lives, but were only focused on convincing them to join the mix-gender congregations.⁷¹ In doing so, Roper again attributes competitive motivations to the men of the Reformation. Earlier historians argued that these mixed-gender congregations heralded more equality between genders, but Roper sees it as another way for men to “win” the argument. Roper does not see Reformers actively convincing women to leave convents as signs of care for the women or a desire to improve their lives. Instead she sees it as unnecessary competition that, in the long run, restricted women’s choices.

The American historian and professor Merry E Wiesner, makes similar arguments. Wiesner in fact puts herself in the same category as Roper. At the end of Wiesner’s book *Gender, Church and State in Early Modern Germany* published in 1998, Wiesner summarizes historians’ work on women in the Reformation and puts herself alongside Lyndal Roper in her list of historians who argue that the Reformation was bad for women.⁷²

⁶⁹ Roper, 239.

⁷⁰ Roper, 241.

⁷¹ Roper, 242.

⁷² Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Gender, Church, and State in Early Modern Germany: Essays*. (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1998), 202.

In her article “Women’s Response to the Reformation”, Wiesner argues that women were considered equal in salvation but subordinate in all other ways.⁷³ The Reformation narrowed women’s vocations, so the only legitimate choice was marriage. Like Roper, Wiesner argues that Protestant’s view of prostitution moved those women from the margins of society to completely outside it. Brothels in the sixteenth century were heavily regulated and in Frankfurt and Mainz they were run by the bishop or religious house. She even notes that the Bishop of Mainz at one point complained that they were not getting enough business, highlighting the church’s involvement in the running of brothels.⁷⁴ Under these regulations, prostitutes were required to wear special clothing or marks and generally lived in specific sections of the city. Women who lived with a man they were not legally married to, for example a priest who was not allowed to marry, were also required to wear the clothing of a prostitute in Strasbourg city.⁷⁵ This put prostitutes clearly in the margins of society. However, legalized prostitution came with protective laws regulating how managers were required to treat the women. Wiesner, therefore, argues that when brothels were shut down, the legal questions shifted from focusing on the health of the women to criminalizing it.⁷⁶ Prostitutes no longer had the protection of the law. Like Roper, Wiesner views prostitution as a legitimate job opportunity for women that the Reformation takes away.

Wiesner argues that being limited to the position of wife stripped women of the ability to create community in the same way men could through, for example, guilds.

⁷³ Ronnie Po-chia Hsia and Merry Wiesner, “Women’s Response to the Reformation,” in *The German People and the Reformation* (Cornell Univ. Pr., 1994), 150.

⁷⁴ Wiesner, *Gender, Church, and State in Early Modern Germany*, 102.

⁷⁵ Wiesner, *Gender, Church, and State in Early Modern Germany*, 104.

⁷⁶ Wiesner, *Gender, Church, and State in Early Modern Germany*, 112.

Wiesner does note a few exceptions to this by arguing that wealth played a large part in what women had access to. Wiesner points to the fact that wealthy and politically powerful women exchanged letters with reformers like Luther and Calvin.⁷⁷ Similarly, she argues that pastors' wives were more involved in the community but phrases it in the negative by saying they had "additional burdens"⁷⁸ as opposed to calling them opportunities or influence. Although Wiesner is addressing women's place in society she does not primarily approach it through the lens of social hierarchy. Instead, she uses relational terms reflecting Tannen's theory of "community". She does not focus on women's place in the hierarchy, but instead points to how their position impacted their opportunities for relationships, both good and bad. She argues their position provides them with opportunities to correspond with prominent reformers and places more burdens on their lives through the extra service their community expected of them.

In her book, Wiesner includes examples of both male and female writers to round out the picture of women in the Reformation. Wiesner point out that German Protestant women writers consistently wrote about their calling in the family and focused largely on their role as mother, grandmother, and daughter. Wiesner does reference a few women who wrote or preached against their families' wishes, which would indicate women asserting some sense of independence. Argula von Grumbach supported Luther against her husband's wishes, and Anna von Medum preached to the Jews despite her family telling her not to.⁷⁹ Wiesner also notes that women used their calling in the family as a catalyst for their activities outside the

⁷⁷ Ronnie Po-chia Hsia and Merry Wiesner, 153.

⁷⁸ Ronnie Po-chia Hsia and Merry Wiesner, 163.

⁷⁹ Wiesner, *Gender, Church, and State in Early Modern Germany*, 43-44.

home.⁸⁰ She notes that while women seemed to accept their role in the family, they did not necessarily take to heart the view of their husbands as Christ. Wiesner states, “I can only speculate as to the reasons for this, for no female writer discusses spousehood or wifely duties directly”.⁸¹ However, she suggests three possibilities. First, she argues they may have not been willing to accept the change since there was no pre-Reformation model. Her second suggestion is that it did not benefit women to substitute their “duty to husband for duty to Christ.” Third, she argues that the idea of the priesthood of all believers may have convinced women that they were in fact equal.⁸² Considering Tannen’s lens, I think a fourth possibility is that women were not focused on the hierarchical structure, but instead valued their connection with others and viewed their position as wife and mother as one of community rather than subordination.

In contrast, Wiesner notes that both Protestant and Counter-Reformation male writers emphasized women’s duties as wives. This strikingly different focus is reflected in Tannen’s work. While female reformers focused on their place in the community based on their relationships, male reformers focusing on women’s duties as they fit within the hierarchical structure. This makes sense if men tend to think about status and where they themselves and others fit into that structure. Like Eisler, Wiesner’s underlying assumptions are that women’s values are better for the world than men’s values. When it comes to the Reformation, she sees men’s need for competition as harmful to society.

⁸⁰ Wiesner, *Gender, Church, and State in Early Modern Germany*, 45.

⁸¹ Wiesner, *Gender, Church, and State in Early Modern Germany*, 46.

⁸² Wiesner, *Gender, Church, and State in Early Modern Germany*, 46.

Women as Agents of the Reformation

Writers like Pomeroy discussed earlier, work to not make hasty judgement calls especially when the facts are sparse and actively criticizes other historians for doing exactly that. The same is true of historians writing about the Reformation. Not all writing about women during the Reformation make arguments about whether the Reformation is “better” or “worse”. Some, like Marjorie Elizabeth Plummer, history University of Arizona Professor, focus instead on women’s experiences and motivations. This approach limits the amount of modern context imposed on the women of the past and is more in line with my own approach. In her 2018 article “‘Partner in his Calamities’: Pastors’ Wives, Married Nuns and the Experience of Clerical Marriage in the Early German Reformation” Plummer explores what motivated women to choose marriage. Plummer's main argument is that not enough attention has been given as to why women might opt to marry members of the clergy. She states, “Women need to be seen as agents of the Reformation and their actions and motivations taken as seriously as those of men. Marriage to a priest or monk was as much an act of rebellion for a pastor’s wife as it was for her husband and certainly an equally complicated decision for a nun marrying, but was undertaken for reasons that often differed significantly from a priest or monk”.⁸³

My own use of Tannen’s argument is an attempt to better understand women of the past and treat them as actors with unique motivations and distinctly feminine ways of thinking. Dividing the early Reformation into three phases, Plummer argues that in the early

⁸³ Marjorie Elizabeth Plummer, “‘Partner in His Calamities’: Pastors’ Wives, Married Nuns and the Experience of Clerical Marriage in the Early German Reformation,” *Gender & History* 20, no. 2 (August 2008): 207–27. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0424.2008.00518.x., 208-209.

years of the Reformation (1521-1523) women who chose to marry priests did so at their own cost since marrying a priest was not socially acceptable. Because of that, priests tended to already socially marginalized women such as concubines, widows or nuns who had left their convent. These women faced things like being banished from their homes and losing their citizenship.⁸⁴ She explores how nuns leaving convents often had to fight for their right to get married and sometimes were not able to get their dowries from their former convents or their families.⁸⁵ However, as the Reformation became more socially accepted, priests began to marry middle-class women. Going even further, as clerical marriages became fully accepted in areas, families and cities began to put pressure on former nuns to marry even against their wishes.⁸⁶

Underlying this general outline on shifting society, Plummer focuses on women's motivations and specific stories. She points out that women often had very different arguments for why they were getting married compared to their male counterparts. While it was common for men to argue in favor of women leaving convents due to their physical desires, Plummer states that women did not use this as their justification.⁸⁷ Instead, women argued for a variety of personal reasons. Some said they were leaving because it was not their choice to enter the convent in the first place, but that they had been forced to by their families; others said they had a personal conviction that required them to leave. The fact that women felt the need to justify their choice probably speaks some to the cultural expectations

⁸⁴ Plummer, 210.

⁸⁵ Plummer, 218.

⁸⁶ Plummer, 220.

⁸⁷ Plummer, 219.

of the time. However, it also shows a desire to connect and build their relationships with those around them by explaining the story behind their change of heart.

Focusing on women's agency, Plummer says that middle-class woman and former nuns tended to make arguments more aligned with their male counterparts, used religious beliefs as the basis for their marriage. Plummer states these women, "were more likely to explain how they came to that decision including describing what books they had read and how they had heard about the issue".⁸⁸ On the other hand, lower class women tended to explain the decision "based on economic expediency or family pressure".⁸⁹ Both of these observations reflect Tannen's arguments about how women communicate. By justifying their decision through explaining how they personally came to their conclusion, the women are attempting to build community and intimacy. They are not trying to win an argument but are instead explaining the journey they went on to reach a conclusion, trying to build rapport with their audience. The arguments Plummer attributes to men on the other hand are much more grounded in facts and arguments, reflecting men's tendency to report on an issue versus building rapport.

Plummer states that women "supported marriage, consciously or unconsciously, as the only norm of behavior even while their actions may be seen as 'revolutionary'".⁹⁰ This argument indicates that Plummer may be influenced by feminist historians such as Weiner and Roper as they both focus on the idea that marriage was the only acceptable behavior during the Reformation. However, instead of making a judgement call on how the

⁸⁸ Plummer, 222.

⁸⁹ Plummer, 222.

⁹⁰ Plummer, 222.

Reformation impacted women's lives, she argues that "women who married clergy in the first generation of the Reformation challenged the system, contributed to social change and left us a rich record of women's lives for at least a brief moment of history".⁹¹ Clearly Plummer's primary concern is to make sure the voice and motives of women from the past are heard, not to interpret them through a modern lens.

Before the advent of Women's Studies, historians almost entirely left women out of the conversation. When women were discussed, it was usually in the context of their husbands or how they played into the spread of the movement. Beginning in the 1970s there is a marked difference in the inclusion of women in the conversation. When these historians first began to study and write about women in Reformation Germany, the arguments were overwhelmingly positive. They write about the equality of men and women before God in Protestant theology. They emphasize women's ability to actively participate in church through singing and making decisions about their own theology through reading the Bible for themselves. Likewise, they write about the changes in laws as giving women more legal protection against abusive husbands. When discussing the ending of convents, they emphasize how many women were forced into convents making the Reformers, at least in theory, the liberators of those women. Similarly, the idea that women were actually isolated from society by convents is brought up. The outlawing of prostitution is rarely mentioned. Even those historians who clearly disagreed with the Reformers, do so while assuming the best of the Reformer's motives. They write about how the Reformers were attempting to help and protect women through their ideas. The emphasis these writers put on status, hierarchy,

⁹¹ Plummer, 223.

and independence fits well with Tannen's arguments about men's values. These historians assume that these are the largest shaping factors in human lives.

However, as feminist historians weigh into the conversation, the argument around women of Reformation Germany began to shift. This move reflects both a change in cultural values and the influence of feminist historians bringing their uniquely female perspective to the field of study. Women like Roper and Wiesner, argue that the closing of brothels and convents stripped women of choices of communities outside the home. Arguing that brothels were a legitimate vocational choice reflects the cultural values of the late 20th century. Earlier historians make no such claims since prostitution was more widely considered immoral. When discussing convents, the argument that women were forced into convents is downplayed and instead the emphasis is on the community women shared within the convents. Convents, they argued gave women a community where they could share ideas and have significant voice in how their lives operated. This ideology is similarly reflected in Gerda Lerner's writing about women's need for a community where they can build off one another's ideas. Similarly, the lack of female saints and the possibility of being a nun, they argue, places more limits on women in the religious sphere. They no longer had other women to look up to in the church no did they have a unique position within the church offered them by convents. These arguments place emphasis on community, and women's relationships outside the home.

This dramatic shift in the way women of the Reformation are framed is a direct result of both historians' changing values and the different underlying linguistic assumptions. While historians often look at how culture shapes the topics historians are covering and the way history is being written, the idea that linguistics can play an equally important role is

generally overlooked. The choices historians make in what they emphasize and how they interpret society and interactions can, and in the case of the Reformation, has significantly shaped the narrative.

Chapter 3: A Look at The Writings of Katharina Schütz Zell

Background and Historians' Perspectives

Katharina Schütz Zell was a prolific writer and bold defender of the Protestant faith. She was born around 1498 in Strasbourg, Germany to a respectable family.⁹² Zell's father was an artisan, and she received a basic education so she could read and write, but did not, for example, know Latin.⁹³ As a young adult, Zell lived under a burden of guilt. After reading some of Martin Luther's writings, she became a Reformer, embracing the theology of salvation through faith alone. She later married the Lutheran reformer Matthäus Zell, a partnership based on their shared beliefs and desire to serve God.⁹⁴ Living her life as many of the wives of reformers did, Zell helped the poor and sick, fed many who came into her home, and had the opportunity to interact with major reformers of the area. Even after her husband's death, Zell continued to be an active participant in her community, serving those in need and continuing to write when she felt called to do so. Katharina Zell is unique in several ways. First, while she married a priest, Zell was neither a former nun nor his concubine which was unusual in the early days of the Reformation. She was the first woman from a respectable to

⁹² Authors all treat her name differently. She publishes under both the names Katharina Schütz and later in her life as Katharina Zell. Many authors choose to call her by one of her two published names. For writers discussing her and her husband calling her just Zell is confusing and calling her by her full name or even Schütz Zell is cumbersome. Because this thesis is about women and I therefore only mention her husband in passing, I will refer to her as Zell.

⁹³ Elsie Anne McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 7-8.

⁹⁴ McKee, 50.

marry a priest in Strasbourg.⁹⁵ Second, she published throughout her life which leaves us with a rich collection of her thoughts. Throughout her life, she published four letters she wrote to fellow Christians, the speech she gave at her husband's funeral, and a compilation of hymns which she wrote the introduction to. There is additionally a surviving letter which was not published but preserved. A lay person, Zell wrote in the vernacular mainly about her city and defending the Protestant faith.

While there are more well-known women from this era such as Katherine von Bora, I have chosen Zell because of her distinctive characteristics. Katharina Zell was not wealthy, or a former nun, yet she wrote and published prolifically. This makes her writing a unique study into a lay woman's perspective on how the Reformation shaped the lives of women. Because she is included in many of the historians I have already analyzed earlier in this work, I will be able to analyze how she is viewed by historians and compare that with my interpretation of her writings using Tannen's linguistic lens. Tannen's lens can then be applied as a linguistic tool in understanding Zell's viewpoint. There are obvious limits to the breadth of a case study. However, generalizing requires studying individual women so I aim for this to be a step towards adding to our knowledge about women from this era. Zell can provide a useful look into the ideas of a woman experiencing the changes brought by the Reformation firsthand. Likewise, in order to apply Tannen's linguistic lens, it is vital to read the writings of a woman from the time period instead of dwelling in generalizations.

⁹⁵ Katharina Zell, *Church Mother the Writings of a Protestant Reformer in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, ed. and trans. Elsie Anne McKee (University of Chicago Press, 2006), 58.

It is interesting to note that since Zell's works were only recently translated into English, she was not given much attention by scholars until the 1990s.⁹⁶ In 1999 Princeton Theological Seminary Professor Elise Anne McKee published a two-volume work on the life of Katharina Zell and a translation of all her available writings. This explains why there is relatively little written about Zell before that despite the fact that she is one of the most prolific female writers of the Reformation. Roland Bainton's book *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy* contains the only significant inclusion of Zell before the 1990s. He includes only short biography of significant women including Zell, and his view of women in the Reformation is overwhelmingly positive. His overview of Zell's life focuses on her work hosting people in their home, visiting those in prison, and helping the poor and sick. He highlights multiple instances where Zell provided spiritual aid to both her husband and Ludwig Rabus, another Protestant pastor. He likewise alludes to her influence in calming down the irate John Calvin after he was expelled from Geneva. Finally, he points out that she regularly corresponded with many thinkers – even those who disagreed with her husband theologically. He argues that her public voice was not limited to writing. She also spoke publicly included a funeral address after her husband's death.⁹⁷

Katharina seemed to often be in the thick of things. She organized caring for refugees that came to her city during the Peasant Revolt and hid the reformers Butzer and Egius after they were excommunicated. Near the end of her life, Katharina was criticized by Ludwig

⁹⁶ Ulrike Zitzlsperger, "Mother, Martyr and Mary Magdalene: German Female Pamphleteers and Their Self-Images," *History* 88, no. 291 (2003): pp. 379-392, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229x.00268>, 383.

⁹⁷ Bainton, *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy*, 66-67.

Rabus for “disturbing the peace” when she reprimanded him for something he said from the pulpit. Her response to him was that while she does not preach from a pulpit she did more for the church by visiting the sick than any minister had in visiting those in his church and therefore was not disrupting the peace.⁹⁸ Bainton clearly focuses on the impact and voice Zell had through her writing and speaking in her community.

Historian’s treatment of Zell is shaped by whether the author hopes to use her to demonstrate the benefits of harmful effects of the Reformation on women. By those who write about the Reformation as positive for women, Zell is naturally used as an example of how women benefited. Except for Bainton who devotes an entire chapter to her, most of the historians’ comments about her are brief. However, it is important to note that because much of her work was not translated until the 1990s and by that time the historiography trend had shifted towards arguing that the Reformation was negative for women, many of those historians would not have had easy access to the specifics of her writing and influence which is potentially why she is not used in depth by those writers.

Those who see the Reformation as negative either write of Zell as the exception to the rule or emphasize the limits to her influence. In the introduction to *Holy Household*, Roper argues that while women writers existed in the early years of the Reformation, as it took root, those writers disappeared. Roper mentions Zell as the one exception to this pattern. Even with that exception Roper argues that Zell was in many ways socially marginalized because of her conflict with Rabus and her public criticism of his preaching.⁹⁹ Wiesner approaches Zell with similar brevity but is more optimistic about Zell’s influence. She includes Zell in

⁹⁸ Bainton, *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy*, 72.

⁹⁹ Roper, *Holy Household*, 2-3.

her discussion of women who challenged the idea that women could not speak or write publicly on religion. She, like Roper mentions Zell's conflicted with Rabus and quotes Zell's response to the charge that she was "disturbing the peace," emphasizing Zell's boldness and wiliness to engage publicly with religious issues. Wiesner groups Zell with other women of the era who challenged the divide for women between public and private life.¹⁰⁰ When discussing how the women justified their writing, she argues that Zell viewed the family as "the source of her religious authority in the larger community" instead of a limiting factor.¹⁰¹ Wiesner sees Zell as a women going against the social divide between public and private while Zell herself sees her public life as a continuation from her private life. Similarly, Wiesner states that Zell requested in her writing to be judged not by her gender but as someone with the Holy Spirit.¹⁰² Wiesner focuses on how women like Zell might have helped shape the conversation about women. She states that women "usually presented their cases only in individualized terms, either because they felt this approach would be more effective, they really did perceive their circumstances as extraordinary, or they did not realize the larger implications of their arguments; however a few spoke for all women."¹⁰³ Based on Tannen's lens, I would propose that it is also possible women could more easily shape their arguments in terms of relationships and building rapport with their audience when they shared their personal experiences and reasons instead of attempting to speak for all women.

¹⁰⁰ Wiesner, *Gender, Church and State in Early Modern Germany*, 27-28.

¹⁰¹ Wiesner, *Gender, Church and State in Early Modern Germany*, 44.

¹⁰² Wiesner, *Gender, Church and State in Early Modern Germany*, 66.

¹⁰³ Wiesner, *Gender, Church and State in Early Modern Germany*, 28.

Analyzing the Writings of Zell

My approach to reading Zell's work is using Tannen's lens to analyze what Zell focuses on, what her perspective was on the Reformation, and what her place was as a woman in Reformation Germany. I will analyze the types of words she uses, the way she frames her writings and how that compares with Tannen's lens. I will then analyze what Zell says about women and the assumptions she makes about her place in society as well as that of other women.

Zell often frames her work in terms of her community. This focus reflects Tannen's argument that women tend to be particularly concerned with building community. In her "Letter to the Suffering Women of the Community of Kentzingen Who Believe in Christ, Sisters With Me in Jesus Christ" published in 1524, Zell writes to women whose husbands had been banished from the city for their beliefs. In the letter, Zell emphasizes the community of Christian sisters. She begins and ends her letter by focusing on their relationship as women. At the end of the first paragraph, she writes "my sisters especially beloved in God" and she signs her letter "your fellow sister in Christ".¹⁰⁴ Similar references to "dear sisters" and "dear Christian women" are sprinkled through the letter.¹⁰⁵ Zell's focus on cultivating community and building rapport by emphasizing their shared experience and identities reflects Tannen's argument that women tend to focus on community.

¹⁰⁴ Katharina Zell, *Church Mother the Writings of a Protestant Reformer in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, ed. and trans. Elsie Anne McKee (University of Chicago Press, 2006), 50, 56.

¹⁰⁵ Zell, 52 -55.

Similar sentiments can be found in Zell's letter defending her husband's choice to get married despite being a priest in "Katharina Schütz's Apologia for Master Matthew Zell, Her Husband, Who is a Pastor and Servant of the Word of God in Strasbourg, Because of the Great Lies Invented About Him." The fact that Zell writes the letter in the first place is striking because the one criticism against her husband that spurred her to speak out publicly was about their relationship. She was accused of running away from her husband, and her husband in turn had been accused of cheating on her and abusing her.¹⁰⁶ She responds to these lies by saying, "He and I have never had a quarter of an hour, that is, in summary, no time at all when we have not been at one. Nor has there been any time when he has done me hurt, great or small, with words or deeds – and, I hope, I haven't hurt him either."¹⁰⁷ Zell's emphasis is on their solid and happy relationship. While her writing includes many scriptural justifications of the theology behind clerical marriage and a sharp criticism of the practice of celibate priests, it is striking that the motivation behind the letter was not theology but her relationship. Similarly, her direct response to the lies is to affirm her solid and amicable relationship with her husband. Zell more broadly justifies her writing about the issue by stating that she is worried others will be led astray if she is silent because her silence might appear to be admitting the lies are true. Instead of being worried about the status of her husband, she cites how others will be impacted by hearing the lies and is striving to prevent that from happening.¹⁰⁸ Again, this reflects a focus on community and building good rapport with other Christians.

¹⁰⁶ Zell, 78.

¹⁰⁷ Zell, 78.

¹⁰⁸ Zell, 63-64.

The same type of framing can be found in her last work, published in 1557, where she publicly rebukes Ludwig Rabus. Rabus was a preacher whom she had known for years and who had taken over her husband's position after his death.¹⁰⁹ Zell begins her letter by emphasizing the similarities and shared experiences between her readers and herself. She reminds them that she was born and lived her whole life in Strasbourg (the city whose residents she is addressing in this open letter). Likewise, she gives a brief testimony of how she came to the Reformed faith, again appealing to an experience that her readers likely share. When she talks about her conversion, she even uses the plural saying "many honorable old women and virgins who sought out my company were glad to be my companions. We were in such anxiety and worry about the grace of God, but we could never find any peace in all our many works, practices, and sacraments of that [Roman] church."¹¹⁰ By including others in her conversion story, she again appeals to the community and strives to build rapport with her audience. She speaks of all the work she has faithfully done for the church over the years before giving her rebuke. When she first addresses Rabus's shortcomings she says, "But he has ungratefully turned his back on you, on account of which unworthy act I could not keep silence."¹¹¹ Even her criticism is written in relational terms.

Zell often frames her theology in terms of intimacy and building rapport. In her letter to the women of Kentzingen, Zell emphasizes God's love and closeness to them. She does not encourage the women with promises of defeating their enemy or showing their superiority. Instead, she provides examples of Biblical figures who experienced similar

¹⁰⁹ Elsie Anne McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 130.

¹¹⁰ Zell, 226.

¹¹¹ Zell 228.

suffering emphasizing their similarities. She similarly stresses the closeness of God to them and compares God's love for them with their own love for their children.¹¹² Zell tells the women to comfort their husbands and themselves by remembering "the words that Christ Himself has said: 'Do not fear those who can kill the body, I will show you one who can kill your body and soul and cast them in hell' And shortly after that He says, 'Therefore whoever confesses me before this adulterous and wicked generation, that one I will also confess before my Father and His angels.'"¹¹³ Again her encouragement focuses on their relationship with God and how their actions will impact that relationship. Likewise, she emphasizes their relationship with their husbands by admonishing them to share words of encouragement. She ends the letter by saying "Pray for those who afflict and betray you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.'...No one can do this, however, unless he has the Spirit who He will send to you according to his promise; He Himself wants to be your Comforter, trusted Guardian, and Protector."¹¹⁴ This is not a promise that God will conquer their enemies, but instead that they are God's "children" and that he will comfort and protect them because of that relationship. Her comfort to those women was centered around their community and relationship with God.

Zell clearly accepted the Reformation theology that people had different vocations or callings in life. This extended to the calling of men and women. It is clear that Zell does not believe women have the calling to be clergy as she justifies almost all of her published works with how what she is doing is different from formally preaching. However, she otherwise

¹¹² Zell, 54-55.

¹¹³ Zell, 52.

¹¹⁴ Zell, 56.

makes no gender distinctions when it comes to abilities or vocations between genders and seems to see writing as part of her vocation. She viewed people as having different callings but did not view her position in society as a woman as oppressive or as making her inferior to any man. While she did not believe she had the authority to preach, she did believe she had the ability to judge the preaching of others against God's word and to call out those preaching if they were not speaking the truth regardless of gender. She did this on multiple occasions, most notably when she published her criticism of Ludwig Rabus. She never apologizes for being a woman writer, but boldly speaks her beliefs and convictions without hesitation. In her public letter to the city of Strasbourg regarding Rabus she says, "I wrote to him in an admonishing and rebuking way – for I have seen that all the world practices hypocrisy with each other, including brothers in the faith with each other; no one calls another to account (to his face) as Saint Paul did with dear Peter over a lesser matter."¹¹⁵ It is clear throughout her writing that she does not feel that she has just as much of a right to speak the truth as any other Christian. She expects the same moral and religious standards from both men and women and assumes that all Christians have the ability to read the Bible for themselves and judge if someone is preaching or teaching something against the Bible. This implies equal intelligence between both genders and between social classes.

Zell does not see her position as a woman in Reformation Germany as inferior to men. Likewise, she does not accept that she is not allowed to speak in public life or have an opinion as many historians have implied about women in the Reformation. In her letter defending her husband from lies about their marriage, she states that her husband does not know she is writing a defense and that "if he were to learn of it he would not allow me to do

¹¹⁵ Zell, 228.

such a thing.”¹¹⁶ According to Zell her husband saw the lies as something to be endured silently as persecution for his faith. But she then goes on to say that she believes she is commanded to love her neighbor and therefore must speak out. This acknowledgment of the difference of opinion between Zell and her husband is done with no justification for how she can go against her husband. She clearly assumes that her duty is to God and that a difference of opinion between husband and wife is acceptable. Likewise, that fact that she later emphasizes the amicable relationship between them indicates that she has no concerns about having her own opinions and voicing them, even publicly.

When she writes her letter comforting the women of Kentzingen she tells them that their suffering is a gift from God because they are true believers, making no differentiation between men and women. She encourages them to read their Bibles, making the assumption that women have an active role in reading and interpreting Scriptures – not that they are just to be told what to do or believe. Her own vast knowledge of Scripture seen in all of her published writings indicates that she spent time studying the Bible and was deeply engaged in her religious community. Likewise, she models reading stories in the Bible even those about men and applying them to women. She tells the story of Abraham and references many Scriptures that use the word “he” and applies them to the women’s situation. At the end of this section, she says they are not her words, but the words of the Holy Spirit – modeling reading Scriptures and applying it to women even where it does not specifically use female pronouns.¹¹⁷ Going even further, she claims the right to speak words that have the authority of the Holy Spirit with no reference to her sex at all. Likewise in the exhortation she gives at

¹¹⁶ Zell 65.

¹¹⁷ Zell, 53.

her husband's funeral, Zell presses all those who were listening to "love and honor the other remaining leaders...listening to them, follow them insofar as they teach and offer you God's word..."¹¹⁸ Not only does this make no distinction between men and women, it assumes that all lay Christians have the ability and responsibility to discern for themselves if something fits with God's word which implies that women have equal cognitive abilities. Instead of making distinctions between men and women, Zell simply speaks of the duty and calling of all Christians.

Many of the feminist historians argue that the Reformation was negative for women in part because women no longer have the Virgin Mary or female saints to look up to. However, that does not seem to be the case in Zell's writing. While she makes very few references to the Virgin Mary she constantly makes reference to other women from the Bible in her writings indicating that she had no trouble replacing female saints with women in the Bible to look up to. In the speech she gives at her husband's funeral, she first justifies her ability to "preach" because she was a witness to her husband's life, just as Mary Magdalene was told to act as witness and tell the disciples of Jesus's resurrection.¹¹⁹ In the same letter she says she hopes God will give her the grace to deal with the criticisms, just as God "lent to Esther the grace to protect the people of God"¹²⁰ Likewise, at the end of the letter she references how "Elizabeth blessed the Virgin Mary" as an example of a woman speaking.¹²¹ In her other writings she mentions women such as Sarah, the Queen of Sheba, and Anna. She

¹¹⁸ Zell, 118.

¹¹⁹ Zell, 111.

¹²⁰ Zell, 72.

¹²¹ Zell, 82.

seems to have replaced the focus on the Virgin Mary with a focus on many women in the Bible. While historians have written about how the Reformation stripped women of role models, the example of Zell suggests otherwise. In fact, the substitution of other women in the Bible for the Virgin Mary is an interesting one when you consider Catholics emphasis on female virgin saints and the reformers' emphasis on women being holy in their daily lives within the family - not based on virginity. This shifts the Christian female role model away from virginal status and instead onto calling, allowing women of any sexual status to be holy.

Going even further with her view of equality, Zell frequently attributes both male and female qualities to God. Quoting from Isaiah, she tells the women of Kentzingen that God will not forget them just like a mother does not “forget her suckling child”.¹²² Later in her life, Zell published a series of letters and devotionals she had written to Felix Armbruster an elderly nobleman of Strasbourg who was forced to withdraw from society because of an illness.¹²³ In the forward to her devotional on the Lord’s Prayer she first uses both father and mother to reflect God’s care and then goes on to say “But the grace of God through Jesus Christ is the true mother...”.¹²⁴ Comparing God to a mother indicates that Zell believed both men and women reflect the attributes of God in different ways. This clearly assumes that men and women are equal before God.

Zell, quite the opposite from seeing the position as wife and mother as limiting, Zell sees it as the foundation for her public work and places emphasis on ones calling as a Christian. She uses her position as a fellow Christian, woman, and wife to encourages the

¹²² Zell, 54-55.

¹²³ Zell, 124.

¹²⁴ Zell, 152-153.

women of Kentzingen, telling them they have a unique calling from God.¹²⁵ This calling on the lives of both men and women is unique to the Reformation. Zell argues that these women are called to suffer for the sake of Christ and can find comfort in that since God has a plan for their lives despite the difficulties they are experiencing. When Zell writes the defense of her marriage, she justifies her letter by saying she is writing in order to help her community. Instead of claiming special revelation from God, she based her writing on a desire to follow the Bible's teachings on loving one's neighbor. As Wiesner argued, this type of justifications indicates that Zell saw her position in her family and community as part of her justification for speaking publicly.

While some modern historians writing on the Reformation, discussed earlier, cite making prostitution illegal as a negative thing for women because it took away a vocation outside the home, Zell approaches this issue very differently. She is outraged that the Catholic Church required priests to be celibate but then used it as a way to raise money for the church by charging a tax for priests' concubines and children. Likewise, she claims that priests are not interested in marrying because that would limit them to one woman instead of sleeping with seven. Zell argues that according to the Bible, priests should marry, and adultery should be punished. Zell was against sex outside of marriage for both sexes. As a Reformer she saw this move as positive for women, because it protected the wives of priests far more than the concubines were protected and gave the same moral standard to both sexes. She is sympathetic towards the women and children caught in the middle of the corruption around celibate priests and argues that if priests were expected to marry, they would have to take care of their wives and children, which was not happening under the system of the

¹²⁵ Zell, 54.

“celibate” priesthood.¹²⁶ This criticism of both male and female sexual practices indicates that Zell expected the same moral standard from Christians regardless of gender. Zell’s focus on how these practices impact the women of her community reflects Tannen’s lens. Zell uses the Bible to justify her theology, but spends more time discussion the practical impact on women and children indicating that Zell’s focus was on intimacy – the impact priest’s actions had on those closest to him, and community – the differing moral standards between men and women in the church.

Zell does consistently justify her public writings. The fact that Zell felt the need to address potential arguments against her indicates that there were people who did not think she had the right to speak up, but Zell herself used Scripture to reject that idea. Zell ends her letter regarding her marriage by anticipating those who might argue against her due to her being a women using Paul saying woman should be silent. She responds to this with:

“I answer, do you not know, however, that Paul also says in Galatians 3[:28], “in Christ there is neither man nor woman”? And God in the prophet Joel says in chapter 2[28; cf. Acts 2:17], “I will pour out my Spirit over all Flesh, and your sons and daughters will prophesy.” And you know also that Zechariah became dumb, so that Elizabeth blessed the Virgin Mary [cf. Lk 1:22, 42-45]. So may you also receive me in good part. I do not seek to be heard as if I were Elizabeth, or any of the prophets, but only as the donkey whom the false prophet Balaam heard [cf. Lk 1:42-45; Mt 37ff; 2 Sm 12:1ff; Nm 22:28, 30]. For I seek nothing other than that we may be saved together with each other. May God help us to do that, through Christ his beloved Son. Amen.”¹²⁷

Zell’s defense is striking in a couple of ways. First, she points to other Scriptures that speak of men and women being equal before God. She then goes on to reference stories where women spoke when men were unable to or simply did not. Her last example of Balaam and

¹²⁶ Zell, 75-65.

¹²⁷ Zell, 82.

the donkey is particularly significant as that is the example she appeals to predominantly. This example implies the idea that when someone is not doing what God has called them to, God will equip others to speak out – even in that particular example, by opening the mouth of an animal. She ends her appeal by saying she must speak so “that *we* may be saved *together with each other*” (emphasis added).¹²⁸ The language Zell uses is relational. She does not talk about salvation in the abstract, but instead emphasizes the personal and relational aspect of it. Zell draws the reader’s attention back to her beginning argument, where she is articulating her essential justification for writing – loving her neighbor. While the defense of her marriage was confiscated by the city council and she was ordered not to print any further copies, this could have been more related to the fact that she was going against the Catholic clergy and not primarily because she was a woman.¹²⁹ On the other hand, her letter comforting the women of Kentzingen was printed and distributed widely around Germany, a copy even making it into the hands of Martin Luther.¹³⁰ That pamphlet, originally published on July 22, 1524, was republished in November of the same year.¹³¹ This would indicate that her writings were welcomed at least in some circles.

The language and emphasis of Zell’s writing match strikingly with Tannen’s linguistic interpretation. While Zell clearly has a deep understanding of Scripture and quotes it throughout her writing, the Scripture she chooses to include tends to focus on relational aspects of Reformed theology. Likewise, her writings were all to people in the community or

¹²⁸ Zell, 82.

¹²⁹ Zell, 62.

¹³⁰ Zell, 49.

¹³¹ Elsie Anne McKee, *Katharina Schütz Zell* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 58.

around issues happening in their region, indicating her care and concern for those around her as opposed to trying to gain a name for herself through her writings. When she writes words of encouragement, it is done through emphasizing relational closeness. When she writes to criticize lies being spread or actions being taken by members of the community, she first builds rapport with her audience by emphasizing shared experiences and her relationship with others in the community. She generally introduces herself as the wife of Matthäus Zell even after his death. She uses it as an appeal to those who knew and respected her husband as another reason to listen to her. The way Zell frames her arguments reflects the priority she gives to community and to building rapport through her writing.

Katharina Zell speaks with boldness, confident in what she believed, and certain that she had every right to speak her mind, but always within the bounds of what Tannen characterizes as a female mode of discourse. Likewise, people were willing to publish her thoughts and insights, so that others who would never come into contact with her would also hear her words. While it is evident that Zell accepts the Reformed theology that women should not be ordained ministers and wives should be in submission to their husbands, she does not write about those differences in positions or vocation as a limiting or oppressive structure. She views them as different callings, but insists that all Christians, male or female, laity or clergy, are completely equal. For Zell there is no contradiction between equality and having different positions. Zell's conviction that all Christians are equal in the eyes of God and the fact that those convictions were publicized and found an audience in 16th century Germany validates her point of view. She was a lay woman speaking to other lay Christians of her community which provides a unique perspective of the Reformation. By overlooking

or skimming over Zell, historians are doing a disservice to our understanding of the Reformation.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Historians have traditionally overlooked women. Historical interpretations have overwhelmingly been through the lens of male values and communication without attempting to truly understand the motives of women. Going back to the ancient world, historians were almost exclusively male, which laid the foundations for this, but even in our modern world, much of the academic discussion is shaped by men and how they interpret the world. This has left a considerable gap, since the lives and ideas of half the world's population were simply left out. The advent of Women's Studies attempted to rectify this problem. Historians increasingly began to focus on groups that had been largely left out of previous accounts. This brought with it a shift in the linguistic assumptions being made by these feminist historians.

As women begin to have a greater voice in the writing and interpreting of history and as the women of the past were more deeply studied, the underlying linguistic assumptions also changed. These feminist historians began to interpret history through the lens of how women think and perceive the world. Women like Gerda Lerner include these ideas implicitly in their work. When Lerner writes about the "feminist consciousness" she is assuming that for women's ideas to be developed and their voices heard they need a community where that is fostered. Likewise, historians like Eisler push that idea even further, not just arguing that women need an environment where their ideas are fostered, but that the world's problems would be solved by replacing male values with female values. This sort of argument has dramatically reinterpreted the historical conversation.

This can be seen even more strikingly when it comes to the women of the Reformation. Before the advent of Women's Studies, historians wrote almost nothing about

women. When they did mention women, it was to emphasize the improvements made by the Reformation through theological doctrine like the priesthood of all believers. As feminist historians began to study and write about the Reformation, a shift occurred in the accepted historical interpretation. Focusing more on relationships and socially acceptable vocations outside the home, feminist historians began to swing the narrative towards a much more negative view on how the Reformation impacted women. They cited the relationships lost through women being forced to leave convents and the sisterhood created there. Likewise, they emphasized women's inability to preach or have a legitimate calling other than that of wife and mother. Their reinterpretation of the facts is not based upon a significant addition to the primary documents we have access to but instead upon a different perspective and linguistic assumptions being made. This indicates the significance of both feminist historians, and the power of the linguistics assumptions historians make.

When it comes to interpreting women of the past, feminist historians – just like their male counterparts – have overlaid their own value system onto the women who came before them. Historians have always had to fight against the desire to apply their own contemporary cultural standards to past cultures, but that fight is even more difficult when it comes to female historians writing about women. There is naturally a kinship female writers feel with women of the past and it is easier to assume that, as fellow women, we understand the motives and desires of other women. However, that does not mean that intelligent women of the past who lived in different cultures might disagree with us and have different values than those of the historians writing their history.

Become of how dramatically our assumptions can reshape the historical narrative, it is imperative that historians be aware of and transparent about the linguistic assumptions they

are making about both genders. Giving credit to only one set of values could have significantly detrimental consequences. Just as male historians for so long wrote about the world through only the lens of the way men process reality and the values they hold, feminist historians have begun to do the opposite. Instead of balancing the perspective, in some cases, it is completely reversing our interpretation of events, leaving new gaps. In order to gain a balanced and accurate picture of history, the perspectives and values of both men and women must be understood and presented.

In Tannen's article "Agonism in the Academy," she argues against the idea that academia is best served through scholars tearing down one another's ideas. Instead, she proposes that academia would be better served through building on one another's ideas. I have spent most of my thesis critiquing and analyzing other historians' writings. However, instead of concluding that one school of thought has it all right, and the other is all wrong, I would like to propose that much can be learned from both. For example, instead of trying to settle the debate over whether the closing of convents was "good" or "bad" for women, I would suggest that the answer is both. For some women, it was a loss of community and autonomy that were central to their lives. It stripped them of a unique contribution to the church and a way of life outside of marriage. They no longer had this unique and purposeful community for single women. But on the other hand, the closing of convents also brought an equality for men and women that did not exist before. While they did not have the unique role of "nun," they were accepted as equals before God. They could sing and participate in church, read and interpret the Bible for themselves, and contribute to their community by helping the poor and sick. The expectation for women to marry also meant that women did not have to spend their lives separated from the rest of society to have a holy calling or

vocation. Instead, they could do that in their role as wife and mother. Both schools of historians bring different insight to the discussion. They bring to light different key elements of the past, and they also bring with them their own unique blind spots. Analyzing what different schools of historians bring to the table will allow us to build on each other's ideas in a significant way. Critiquing other's ideas is essential to sharpening them. On the other hand, tearing down someone's ideas simply for the sake of winning, does not.

Katharina Zell demonstrates this quite vividly in the way she communicates. She was undoubtedly a courageous woman who knew what she believed, was firm in those convictions, and was willing to boldly speak them. She disagreed with the local pastor publicly but went about it by first building rapport with her audience, pointing out that she had lived and served in that community for years. Only then does she bring her arguments against Rabus, fully steeped in Scriptural references. This bold and seemingly argumentative attitude could appear masculine, but when one examines how she approached her confrontations, it was always within the framework of what Tannen identifies as female characteristics. She centers her conversations around community and focuses on building rapport with her audience, striving to build common ground even with those with whom she disagreed. Zell is bold and encourages other Christians to be bold as well, not in terms of winning battles, but with the knowledge that they are loved by God and surrounded by fellow Christians. Zell is willing to engage with those she disagrees with, but her arguments are not in the abstract. Instead, they are personal and based on relationships. Her critiques and encouragement are written in a uniquely female way.

The different underlying assumptions and values men and women bring to the table provide us with a richer interpretation of history. While early male historians writing about

the Reformation tended to focus on how the movement succeeded, female historians and those influenced by feminist historians focus more on the experience of the Reformation for the common people in their daily lives. Our underlying assumptions shape what we find important, and that, in turn, shapes what we see and write about. Acknowledging and embracing those differences will help historians paint a more complete picture of the world. Being aware of our differences in perspective can help us understand the people and movements of the past, and better portray the complexities of history.

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