

*The Gender of Photography: How Masculine and Feminine Values Shaped the History of Nineteenth-Century Photography.* Nicole Hudgins. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2020. xv + 295pp. ISBN 9781474271561

In *The Gender of Photography*, photographic historian Nicole Hudgins traces the largely overlooked history of women's involvement with photography in the nineteenth century North Atlantic world. Women, she points out, began engaging with photography as soon as it emerged, but a "masculine" bias obscured their activities. However, Hudgins' goal is not to simply recover women's history and add it into the broader existing narrative. Instead, she attempts to deconstruct that narrative by investigating "how gendered behaviour and concerns shaped photographic institutions in the first few decades of the medium's existence" (1). Hudgins engages extensively with the research of relevant photographic historians such as Peter Palmquist, Naomi Rosenblum and Grace Seiberling as well as a range of primary sources drawn from newspapers, journals, advice manuals and nineteenth-century novels.

Hudgins borrows the concept of *yin* and *yang* from Chinese philosophy to frame her discussion and explore the "feminine" and "masculine" values that developed in photography. *Yin* (feminine) and *yang* (masculine) are separate but complementary forces that balance one another. The problem with photography's early years, she maintains, is one of imbalance where the "masculine" perspective became the dominant one. Hudgins's aim is to restore balance through defining what constituted "masculine" and "feminine" values and identifying points of overlap.

The first section of the book unpacks what Hudgins means by the "masculine" and "feminine" values of photography. The "masculine" is closely tied to the values of honour, leadership and competition. Photographic activities tied with the "masculine" include competitive commercial photography (especially in genres that relate to themes of conquest) and the photographic press. The "masculine", however, was not limited to men; women such as Anna Atkins also expressed these values in their photographs. "Feminine" values, Hudgins argues, can be summed up in the word "play", a concept that has been assigned low status. She uses four themes – theatricality, tactility, softness and hybridity – to explore examples of the "feminine" in photography. Examples range from the work of Clementina Hawarden and Julia Margaret Cameron that featured dress-up and tableau vivant to the tactility of hand-retouching or compiling mixed-media albums.

The second section looks at how photography was made "masculine" over the nineteenth century and how the term photographer came to be equated to men. Hudgins looks closely at language and the use of the word "man" as a supposedly gender-neutral term that actually embedded the "masculine" into photography, resulting in the "feminine" being silenced. Despite the numerous examples of women's participation in the early years of photography, after 1850 there was a shift to focus on men's activities. Hudgins discovers the root to this shift in the rise of Republicanism and the ensuing emergence of fraternal organisations. Photographic societies and the related photographic press supported evolving ideas about masculinity, resulting in organisations that were spaces for men with low female membership. With the rise of these male-dominated societies, photographic knowledge became gendered as male. By focusing on male scientists, inventors and artists, these societies established a patrilineal line for photography that had no room for women. Hudgins colourfully describes this as a "galloping masculinization of photography" (107). Such gendering was not unique to photography; it was also occurring in the sciences and fine art. Hudgins finds that women's own response to the "masculinisation" of photography played a

role in its gendering: “Women’s compliance with the taboo against female publicity led both to their future invisibility, and to a tenacious imbalance in the historiography” (130). Using the work of social scientists, Hudgins explores some of the causes of female reticence to speak in public, mixed-sex groups.

Although they were ignored and marginalised, women did continue to engage with photography during the nineteenth century. The third section focuses on their work in studios and the surrounding attitudes. Although women were not encouraged to participate in “masculine” activities such as membership in photographic societies, some aspects of photography were seen as appropriate for their “feminine” talents. Within male-run studios, women were employed for the lower-prestige tasks of printing, mounting, retouching and colouring. This association of colouring in particular as low status was also reflected in the eyes of photographic societies who rejected colouring as “impure”. However, certain aspects of photography such as the arrangement of photograph parlours embraced “feminine” values. Hudgins concludes her discussion of women’s photographic activity with examples of women who owned and operated successful studios, pointing out that they never received the professional credit that some males did.

As promised, Hudgins restores women to the history of photography in the nineteenth century, and her book is perhaps most valuable for the amount of detail that it recovers. Where the book falls short is the *yin* and *yang* framework, which feels somewhat contrived (Hudgins does ask her readers to keep an open mind on her borrowing of the concept), but readers can disregard this framework without losing the argument. Hudgins makes a compelling case for the role of photographic societies and the photographic press in restricting and obscuring women’s involvement with photography, but they were one part of a complex history that also limited women in other areas and she perhaps overstates their power. The book would have benefited from less attention spent on those male-dominated groups and a fuller discussion of women as photographic consumers, a “feminine” activity that was acceptable in nineteenth-century society and perhaps the best place to find an empowering story of women and photography. Overall, however, the book is an important contribution towards understanding women’s engagement with photography in the nineteenth century.

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