
The Victoria Press Circle

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The Victoria Press began as an outgrowth of SPEW (Society for Promoting the Employment of Women), a group of Victorian feminists who sought to provide new avenues for women's work in the printing industry. SPEW activists, led by Emily Faithfull, set up a Press where women worked as compositors (Tusan, 2004; Fredeman, 1974). Presswomen printed anthologies, tracts, and feminist periodicals, including the monthly *English Woman's Journal* (1858-1864), which published mainly contributions by women. Publication of the *English Woman's Journal* (EWJ) spanned "the period between the failed attempt to reform legislation that prevented married women holding property in 1857 and the equally unsuccessful attempt to win female suffrage in 1867" (Mussell, 2008). Articles in the EWJ promoted both of these reform measures and advocated for female employment in different fields, as well as other contemporary feminist causes. My use of the term "feminist," though anachronistic to the movement, has been accepted by other scholars writing about the period, who choose the word to demonstrate an active and purposeful engagement with the continuous struggle for women's rights (see Phegley, 2004; Mussell, 2012; Frawley, 1999).

My digital project, The Victoria Press Circle, funded by Princeton's Center for Digital Humanities, offers open-access network visualizations of the women and men involved in the Victoria Press, based on contents of the EWJ and three anthologies printed at the Press between 1861 and 1863. The Victoria Press Circle's first aim is reconstruction: the project helps to establish the history of the Victoria Press, since there is no existing archive. This is especially important since the EWJ includes a high percentage of unsigned contributions (about 40 percent). None of the women who published in the EWJ currently have significant digital representation. Identifying them as individuals combats the critical undervaluing of texts in female-produced periodicals, and studying them as a group highlights authors who may not receive attention individually.

Furthermore, this project demonstrates collaboration. A network-focused approach is particularly appropriate because the Victoria Press was constructed on a material model of collaborative female labor. Its founders explicitly attempted to build a hub of social interaction around the Press, creating venues to promote women's rights. SPEW members saw their office as a meeting place for women advocating for female employment:

It is also the intention of the Society to render their office a *depôt* for information of every kind relating to the employment of women. Curious and interesting facts will be collected. Extracts from newspapers, pamphlets, and speeches on the subject, will be gathered together, and kept for the inspection of members of the Society (EWJ, 1859).

In creating network graphs, I am reconstructing how the Presswomen built a social network for themselves, not imposing intentionality on their project (Weingart, 2013). All of my data will be freely available and downloadable in .csv format for other researchers to access and use.

Ultimately, The Victoria Press Circle's open-access website will display at least three network visualizations, constructed in Cytoscape, of those involved in the Press: one composite graph for the three anthologies; one graph for the EWJ; and one combined visualization for all the publications. Cytoscape, though a tool designed for biomolecular analysis, is more flexible than Gephi for social network analysis, especially for specific functions of filtering based on node and edge attributes and on network statistics (see Shannon, 2003).

In addition to literary contributors, my visualizations include compositors, engravers, printers, editors, and paper manufacturers. Marianne Van Remoortel (2015) has helped in identifying names of compositors from newspaper reports and census data. While the individual model of many digital archives privileges authors and minimizes others involved in literary production, the women of the Press were working at every level of print culture to advance their social aims. By valuing all types of contributions equally, my visualizations illustrate their collaborative effort. The Presswomen's project echoes through current debates in digital humanities about the necessity of learning to code for engagement in DH work (Dinsman, 2016). I believe that programming can be a feminist act for scholars, just as involvement in print culture was a feminist act for Victorian female authors. The artisan practice of printing is analogous to the artisan practice of coding, and both are affected

by experiences of gender, race, class, and sexuality. I hope to use my project to show how women worked with their hands and their pens in tandem, and how I'm continuing that work today.

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