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# Imaginative methods: a feminist rereading of John Maynard Keynes

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IMAGINATIVE METHODS:  
A FEMINIST REREADING OF JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES

A Thesis

Presented in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

June, 2017

BY

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis uses a feminist lens to reveal aspects of the life of John Maynard Keynes that previous scholarship has missed. It uses a feminist framework to view the connections between Keynes's lived experiences, beliefs, and work in a fuller and more nuanced way. The research highlights the importance of Keynes's sexuality, his connection to women and women's issues, and the significance of his relationships to friends, family, lovers, and colleagues. Feminist theory questions objectivity in knowledge production, argues for the importance of lived experience, and requires us to grapple with interconnected identities, which leads to a new interpretation of Keynes's life. His life becomes a historically situated project where every event had a personal and professional impact.

*Keywords:* John Maynard Keynes, feminism, Bloomsbury, Keynes bisexuality, Keynes and women

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

John Maynard Keynes thought himself to be extremely ugly.<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf once wrote in her diary that Keynes looked akin to “a gorged seal, double chin, ledge of red lip, little eyes, sensual, brutal, unimaginative.”<sup>2</sup> Likely, in part because of his feelings about his unattractiveness, Keynes sought approval from his friends. After noticing how deeply Keynes craved praise for himself and his work, Woolf questioned him. She pointed out that, as someone who had grown in fame and scholarship, Keynes should be above his desire for approval, saying “It’s odd that you, of all people, should want praise—you...are passed beyond boasting.” Tellingly, Keynes responded simply and directly, “I want it for the things I’m doubtful about.”<sup>3</sup> Biographer David Felix argues that this admission portrays the uncertainty within, in contrast to the certainty without.<sup>4</sup> Considering how certain Keynes seemed of his work and opinions in the public realm,<sup>5</sup> this admission of uncertainty illustrates how Keynes’s public persona did not always match the person inside.

Starting in 1910 and continuing for over a decade, Keynes was challenged, pushed, and praised by his friends in the Bloomsbury Group. They questioned his work, his relationships, and his choices. Because of this, Keynes was intimately attached to his friends. This attachment was not based in superficial conversation. He shared his innermost thoughts and anxieties, read their

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<sup>1</sup> Davenport-Hines, *Universal Man: The Lives of John Maynard Keynes*, (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 192.

<sup>2</sup> Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie, eds, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Two 1920-1924*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 69.

<sup>3</sup> Bell, *The Diary: Volume Two*, 121.

<sup>4</sup> David Felix, *Keynes: A Critical Life*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 186.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Richard Davenport-Hines, 12-13, 60-61, and 126.

work, and shared his own. They challenged each other, often in acerbic ways that made outsiders question whether they enjoyed each other's company or simply enjoyed ripping each other to shreds. Keynes's first and official biographer, Roy Harrod, discusses this frankness of Bloomsbury, arguing that "within the circle they were keenly critical of one another. There was no question of molly-coddling. A sharp, biting criticism blew through all the recesses of their habitations. They did not give mercy or expect it."<sup>6</sup> It was this terseness, this direct tone, that led to intimacy. In his book on Bloomsbury, Peter Stansky discusses these Bloomsbury suppositions, explaining "the most-quoted Bloomsbury remark was a question: 'What exactly do you mean?' One would not be allowed to get away with sloppy thinking...one had an obligation to be honest and tell one's opinion."<sup>7</sup>

But Bloomsbury was not simply a group of friends leveling critiques at one another. They also provided the approval Keynes needed for that which he was "doubtful about." The Bloomsbury group was open about sexuality,<sup>8</sup> among other taboo subjects, and Harrod argues that "Bloomsbury was in a very real sense his home," where he was always "welcome[d]...as one of themselves."<sup>9</sup> Bloomsbury was also a place of acceptance for Keynes. It provided him with a group of people with whom he could be his whole self and could talk openly. In his three-volume biography of Keynes, Robert Skidelsky explains that Keynes "was unshockable; and the indelicacy to which he gave free rein with his friends was usually regarded as a social asset."<sup>10</sup> Bloomsbury both challenged and provided praise for Keynes.

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<sup>6</sup> R.F. Harrod, *The Life of John Maynard Keynes*, (London: Macmillan & Co, Ltd, 1951), 187.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Stansky, *On Or About 1910: early Bloomsbury and Its Intimate World*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 9.

<sup>8</sup> Stansky, 10.

<sup>9</sup> Harrod, 178.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes: Hopes Betrayed: 1883-1920*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 248.



While this quote from Woolf's diary about Keynes's desire for praise is illuminating, it is not widely known. It is not a famous conversation, and this need for approval from his friends is not something Keynes is known for. In larger society, Keynes is remembered for *The General Theory*, his connection to Keynesian economics, his co-creation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and (depending on left- or right-leaning opinions) his pro-capitalist or pro-socialist tendencies. He was an economist, yes. But he was also a human being needing assurance, looking for love, challenging his friends, and dabbling in all sorts of hobbies and interests. Why do we know Keynes mainly as an economist? What makes one part of a man more important than another? Why are parts of a life kept separate from one another? Why is this story of Keynes asking for Woolf's assurance so peripheral to his creation of economic theory?

I begin with this story and these questions to point out the importance of viewing Keynes's life as nuanced and interconnected. Readers and scholars who view Keynes as an economist separate from his lived experiences only gain a partial understanding of Keynes. In their anthology on feminist epistemology, Joan Hartman and Ellen Messer-Davidow argue that:

the knower's perspective is determined by her values, ideas, and feelings, and these in turn are produced by her location in a society. What locates her in society are her cultural circumstances. Because the circumstances of knowers are diverse, their perspectives diverge. The circumstances that diversify the perspectives of knowers are: (1) their technical training... (2) their affiliations with a sex, race, class, affectional preference and other cultural categories; (3) their personal histories; and (4) their critical reflection on the ways these circumstances organize intellectual endeavors.<sup>11</sup>

The way we know is based on our positionality and identities. Each choice, relationship, experience, belief, and piece of work is historically situated in the context of our lives. Keynes's life was no different. To understand the work he created and the life he led, we need to understand his life as an interconnected web of identities and personal experiences.

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<sup>11</sup> Joan E. Hartman and Ellen Messer-Davidow, eds., (*En*)*Gendering Knowledge: Feminists in Academe*, (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 37.

In this thesis, I argue that in rereading John Maynard Keynes through a feminist lens, his life takes on different aspects than seen in scholarship to date. Using a feminist framework, we can view the connections between Keynes's life experiences, his beliefs, and his work in a fuller and more nuanced way than the views offered by past scholarship. A feminist analysis discloses the importance of relationships and enhances our understanding of how events and individuals had an influence on him. I rely on a range of feminist theories to create a rereading of the life of Keynes. Because feminist theories question objectivity in knowledge production, argue for the importance of lived experience, and require us to grapple with interconnected identities, they provide a necessary framework for new interpretations of the man's life. In viewing him thus, Keynes's life becomes a historically situated project where each event had an impact and made him the man and economist he was.

### **Significance**

Of course, Keynes's work *does* stand alone in the history of economic thought. The volumes upon volumes that have been written about his *General Theory* alone attest to the importance and longevity of his work.<sup>12</sup> But scholarship about his economic theory and the school of thought that emerged from them does not give us a full understanding of the man, and vice versa. In the following chapter, I sketch a brief biography of Keynes. I follow this biography with a specific look at his sexuality, his relationships to women, and his enjoyment of connecting with others based on lived experiences. I focus on Keynes's specific identities and relationships to provide a different look at his life. In writing his biography this way, I claim my subjectivity. In her book on feminist epistemology, Mary Hawkesworth explains how "feminist research is

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, A.C. Pigou's *Keynes's 'General Theory'*, Roy Harrod's *The Life*, Robert Dimand's anthology *Keynes's General Theory After Seventy Years*, Donald Moggridge's *Maynard Keynes: An Economist's Biography*, and Victoria Chick's *Macroeconomics After Keynes*.

informed by a politics. But unlike methodologies...which explicitly deny any political dimension to 'scientific' inquiry, feminist research acknowledges that particular political convictions inspire its existence."<sup>13</sup> I do not pretend that my method of biographing Keynes is objective, but instead posit that in writing his life this way, I am conducting feminist research by acknowledging that my analysis provides a "different account from that advanced by nonfeminists."<sup>14</sup>

In chapter three, I analyze what makes my method of reading Keynes's life different from existing biographies and what makes it feminist. I argue that by bringing identities, relationships, and experiences from the periphery to the margins and by asking questions that have not been addressed elsewhere, we can see the bias of past biographers and scholars. Hawkesworth explains that some feminist scholars posit that "historical narratives are framed by questions that reflect the preoccupations and concerns of the writers."<sup>15</sup> Every scholar and writer brings pieces of themselves to their work. In asking specific questions and centering specific relationships, I point to how, by not exploring the answers to these questions, past scholarship has ignored the importance of certain connections.

Additionally, I contend that a rereading of Keynes can elucidate the ways Keynes's life can be interpreted as feminist. Using feminist scholarship from socialist feminists,<sup>16</sup> standpoint feminists,<sup>17</sup> intersectional feminists,<sup>18</sup> and transnational feminists,<sup>19</sup> I present the ways Keynes life fit into a feminist framework and can be understood and critiqued as feminist. For example, I

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<sup>13</sup> Mary Hawkesworth, *Feminist Inquiry: From Political Conviction to Methodological Innovation*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>14</sup> Hawkesworth, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Hawkesworth, 70.

<sup>16</sup> I use socialist feminist theory from Millicent Fawcett, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Nancy Fraser. See section on "Theory" for further explanation on the ways I employ socialist, standpoint, intersectional, and transnational feminist theory.

<sup>17</sup> Nancy Hartsock, Donna Haraway, and Sandra Harding, for example.

<sup>18</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Barbara Smith.

<sup>19</sup> Chandra Mohanty and Jacqui Alexander.

argue that although Keynes was an imperialist, much of the feminist movement from his time and location was based in imperialism,<sup>20</sup> making Keynes a product of his time.

Thus, this project is significant because it challenges the notion that we must keep the personal and the anecdotal separate from the political and objective. As Sheila Rowbotham discusses in her book about feminism through the twentieth century, feminist thinking has resisted the separation of personal and political while “seeking to translate personal experiences and desires into the public sphere of politics.”<sup>21</sup> Since Keynes’s lived experiences factored into the creation of who he was as a person, it is not a stretch to see how his personal experiences and beliefs factored into his political and public beliefs. By providing a feminist intervention into a rereading of Keynes’s life (which I discuss more deeply later in this chapter), I argue that if all individuals make choices and hold beliefs based on personal experiences, then we can understand Keynes’s life more fully by looking closely at his experiences and relationships. Only by developing an understanding of Keynes’s lived experiences in connection with his work can we understand the nuance and significance of both.

### **Personal Positionality**

My interest in the connections between lived experiences, scholarship, and theory has evolved over many years. As an undergraduate student in a small liberal arts college in a small Midwestern town, I had diverse interests that did not always dovetail. Because of this, I concentrated in three areas of study: economics, anthropology, and women’s studies. In hindsight, I can easily make connections between these three areas of scholarship, but at the time they felt like separate worlds.

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<sup>20</sup> See Susan Archer Mann, *Doing Feminist Theory*, Chapter 8.

<sup>21</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day: Women Who Invented the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Verso, 2010), 240.

I enjoyed economics at first, but began to struggle after a couple years. I could not understand why I was struggling. I attributed my challenges to a lack of natural proclivity for economic thinking. In reality, I was struggling to make meaning of what I was learning. I did not see myself in economic scholarship in any way. The assumptions we were asked to make in order for theory to fit reality erased my experience. For example, I remember my annoyance at the idea of the “rationality” of human behavior and the “perfect information” assumption posited by neoclassical economic thought.<sup>22</sup> I was constantly questioning what was meant by “rationality.” In a society that has historically labeled women “emotional” and “irrational,” this assumption felt like an erasure of female experience. And “perfect information” did not seem to exist in my world when a doctor could not tell me the cost of a birth control procedure.

In my junior year of college, a combination of courses helped me to make connections and see things differently. In History of Economic Thought, I read Aristotle, Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and Keynes, among others. At the same time, I was taking Anthropology courses that forced me to question epistemologies. Who decides what is objective? Who are the knowledge producers? How is all knowledge creation biased by the creator? These two courses compelled me to think about economics as a study in human behavior created by fallible humans.

However, it was not until I was sitting in a graduate level Women’s and Gender Studies course that I realized I could combine these two modes of thinking. I wondered aloud if anyone had thought to look at the life of Maynard Keynes using feminist theory, and my musing was validated by the professor and other students. This project is the culmination of my years of study in women’s studies, economics, and the desire to create knowledge that is more inclusive of lived experiences and the multiplicity of identity.

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<sup>22</sup> See, for example, macroeconomics textbooks such as N. Gregory Mankiw’s *Principles of Economics*.

## Theory

A feminist intervention into the reading of the life of Maynard Keynes requires multiple types of feminist theory. By using multiple forms of feminist theory by multiple feminist theorists, I aim to situate Keynes within the feminism of his time, situate my own feminism, and use feminist thought to critique Keynes and past scholarship on his life.

Although the term “feminism” existed in the 1800’s, it was not commonly used by advocates for women’s rights until right before the First World War.<sup>23</sup> The absence of explicitly feminist language can make it easy to ignore or erase the importance of feminism in Britain during Keynes’s early life in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s. Nonetheless, feminism was alive and moving during this time. For example, Susan Archer Mann explains that suffrage movements in France in the 1880’s used the term feminism and “over the next decade, the term migrated to England, though it was mainly used by detractors.”<sup>24</sup> Much like contemporary feminism, feminism of that time took many forms, including socialists, communists, anarchists, free thinkers, liberals, progressives, sexual radicals, and even those who promoted the eugenics movement.<sup>25</sup> Not all women who pushed for women’s equality agreed on the terms of equality. For example, many white suffrage groups did not want to include black women. Mann describes how in the United States attempts by black suffragettes to “foster interracial cooperation for suffrage were rebuked or went unheeded...black suffragists reported being asked not to march with white suffragists, but to walk with their own race at the end of parades or demonstrations.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Susan Archer Mann, *Doing Feminist Theory: From Modernity to Postmodernity*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2012), 2.

<sup>24</sup> Mann, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Rowbotham, *Dreamers*, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Mann, 47.

Feminists in the early 1900's, much like some contemporary feminists, did not agree on terms of inclusion.

These conflicting feminisms *did* converge in a significant way. Rowbotham argues that “many of their preoccupations overlapped and interacted...this convergence was most evident around the boundaries that marked personal and public identities. In both Britain and the United States, women who braved the public arena found themselves subverting gendered assumptions.”<sup>27</sup> It was the connection between domestic space and public space, personal experience and political experience, that connected these feminists across their different beliefs.

Therefore, feminism in Britain during the turn of the century was defined by making the personal political<sup>28</sup> and centering lived experiences. Anarchist feminist Emma Goldman, for example, believed in the importance of connecting one's personal needs with those of a larger group.<sup>29</sup> In an interview later in her life, she stated “I want the events of my life to stand out in bold relief from the social background...a sort of conjunction between my own inner struggle and the social struggles outside.”<sup>30</sup> Goldman grappled with connecting her personal experience and needs to that of a larger political struggle. Additionally, liberal feminists, such as Millicent Fawcett, argued strongly for women's suffrage above all else. In Fawcett's own words, “If the courtesy of men to women is bought at [the price of the rights and privileges of citizenship], it must not be forgotten that the *sale* is compulsory, and can in no case be regarded as a free contract.”<sup>31</sup> Fawcett and others argued that keeping women apart from men politically was not

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<sup>27</sup> Rowbotham, *Dreamers*, 4.

<sup>28</sup> Although the idea of bringing the personal and domestic into the realm of the public and political existed in the early 1900's with women trying to gain economic independence, birth control rights, suffrage, etc., the slogan “the personal is political” was not coined until 1969, by Carol Hanisch in her article of the same name.

<sup>29</sup> Rowbotham, *Dreamers*, 52.

<sup>30</sup> Candace Falk, *Love, Anarchy and Emma Goldman: A Biography*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1984), 7.

<sup>31</sup> Henry Fawcett and Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *Essays and Lectures on Social and Political Subjects*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1872), 252.

worth the “courtesies” and trivialities bestowed on women. Lastly, socialist feminists, such as Rosa Luxemburg, argued for the importance of a feminist movement that was based in anti-capitalism as well as gender equality.<sup>32</sup> These three types of feminism, anarchist, liberal, and socialist, made up the feminist theory present during much of Keynes’s life.

Though I use late nineteenth and early twentieth century feminist theory to situate Keynes historically, I rely on standpoint theory and intersectionality for the basis of my feminist rereading of Keynes’s life. Standpoint feminist theorists point to the importance of personal experience when creating knowledge. Lived experiences give people a specific vantage point from which to view power, theory, and relationships. For example, Nancy Hartsock points to the ways experiences differ depending on an individual’s positionality, and she argues that these differences in positionality can create different types of knowledge.<sup>33</sup> This means that individuals who hold marginalized positions in society, such as women, members of the LGBTQIA community, individuals with disabilities, or people of color, know more about their lives than the dominant group could know. Marginalized peoples are also located to better understand power relations than those in the dominant group. Hartsock argues, “if material life is structured in fundamentally opposing ways for two different groups, one can expect that the understanding of each will represent an inversion of the other, and in systems of domination the understanding available to the ruling group will be both partial and perverse.”<sup>34</sup> In a system of binaries, individuals outside the norm are best situated to present information about their circumstances.

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<sup>32</sup> Mann, 316.

<sup>33</sup> Nancy Hartsock, “The Feminist Standpoint Revisited.” in *The Socialist Feminist Project: A Contemporary Reader in Theory and Politics*, ed. Nancy Holmstrom. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002). Hartsock’s “Standpoint Revisited” is in response to critique about her original article, “The Feminist Standpoint” from 1983. In her “Revisited” article, she works to make her original argument more clear and inclusive.

<sup>34</sup> Hartsock, “The Feminist Standpoint Revisited.”, 351.



Hartsock and other standpoint theorists<sup>35</sup> point to the importance of acknowledging the different experiences and forms of knowledge that can emerge from the margins. bell hooks, for example, argues that black women and other oppressed groups “often acquire an awareness of patriarchal politics from their lived experiences...the implication being that people who are truly oppressed know it even though they may not be engaged in organized resistance or are unable to articulate in written form the nature of their oppression.”<sup>36</sup> Although Maynard Keynes could not be said to have lived his life completely in the margins, certain aspects of his identity were marginalized. Standpoint theory allows these identities to be brought to the center rather than positioned as peripheral and separate from his “true” self.

Similarly, incorporating Donna Haraway’s “situated knowledges” helps to create connections between Keynes’s lived experiences, identities, and work. She argues that “feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge”<sup>37</sup> in which “accounts of a ‘real’ world do not, then, depend on a logic of ‘discovery’ but on a power-charged social relation of ‘conversation.’”<sup>38</sup> Employing Haraway’s “situated knowledges” puts Keynes’s lived experiences in conversation with each other as well as with his identities and beliefs. Additionally, using situated knowledge as methodology allows me to see the ways Keynes’s positionality and identities informed his relationships, activities, and his work.

To better understand Keynes’s standpoint, I also use intersectionality to point to his interconnected identities. Standpoint theory is useful because it points to the importance of knowledge creation from the margins, but it assumes individuals hold one central identity, such

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<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Sandra Harding’s *The Feminist Standpoint Reader*, and Patricia Hill Collins’s *Black Feminist Thought*.

<sup>36</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1984), 11.

<sup>37</sup> Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14 no. 3 (1988): 583.

<sup>38</sup> Haraway, 593.

as womanhood. Intersectional feminism requires us to see how individuals hold multiple identities, and thus one single standpoint can erase the multiplicity of experience. Additionally, intersectional feminists, such as Barbara Smith<sup>39</sup> and Kimberlé Crenshaw<sup>40</sup>, argue that to make social change, we must first look at our differences and the different interlocking oppressions and privileges that make up our identities. Intersectionality insists that an individual cannot be diluted down to one specific identity. Thus, we cannot view Keynes as a white British male with varying degrees of financial security without also seeing his bisexuality, his lifelong medical issues, and his connection to politically conscious and activist women. It is within the intersections of identities that we experience the world and create knowledge.

Lastly, I use transnational feminist theory to critique early feminism, Keynes himself, and existing biographies of Keynes. Transnational feminism incorporates critiques of Global North-centric, Global South-passive, location-based feminisms<sup>41</sup> in order to portray the ways, as Lela Fernandez argues, “large-scale events and processes...are perceived, framed, experienced, and negotiated in ways that are shaped by distinctive local and national contexts.”<sup>42</sup> Transnational feminism provides a lens to look at the nation-state and the boundaries that have been created by colonialism and imperialism. Chandra Mohanty argues, “our most expansive and inclusive visions of feminism need to be attentive to borders while learning to transcend them.”<sup>43</sup> I use the work of transnational feminists such as Fernandez and Mohanty<sup>44</sup> to critique Keynes’s belief in

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<sup>39</sup> Barbara Smith, *Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around: Forty Years of Movement Building with Barbara Smith*, eds. Alethia Jones and Virginia Eubanks, (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2014).

<sup>40</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Intersectionality and Identity Politics: Learning from Violence Against Women of Color,” in *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, ed. Wendy K. Kolmer and Frances Bartkowski, (New York: McGraw Hill Companies, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> Mann, 363.

<sup>42</sup> Lela Fernandez, *Transnational Feminism in the United States: Knowledge, Ethics, and Power*, (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 4.

<sup>43</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>44</sup> See also Jacqui Alexander’s *Pedagogies of Crossing* and Uma Narayan’s “Dislocating Cultures.”

Euro-centricity and his racist and anti-Semitic views. Additionally, I use the transnational feminist understanding of border fluidity to discuss the ways that Keynes's non-normativity gave him a wider understanding of issues. Mohanty explains how, in her own life, "the maps [she] draws are necessarily anchored in [her] own discontinuous locations."<sup>45</sup> Transnational feminist thought on the importance of transcending imposed borders helps me to see the ways Keynes transcended boundaries in his life.

However, as I mention above, Keynes did not solely transcend boundaries, he also imposed them through some problematic views and actions. For example, early in his career, he worked for the India Office in London where he made suggestions for investment and monetary policy.<sup>46</sup> Transnational feminist theory forces us to question how an individual who had never visited India and was working for an imperialist British government could be tasked with overseeing the creation of Indian policy. It is necessary to view Keynes's interactions with India and with other foreign countries in terms of colonialism and British imperialism or risk erasing the experiences and lives of those negatively affected. While I do not believe Keynes explicitly created policies with the intention of bolstering British power and rule over others, I do believe that we cannot fully understand Keynes if we divorce his work from a history of British colonialism and imperialism.

Lastly, I use work by transnational feminists to argue for the importance of historical location, emphasis of difference, and lived experiences. For example, Chandra Mohanty argues that assuming a Global North superiority and a Global South homogeneity erases difference and historical context.<sup>47</sup> I use the work of these transnational feminists to argue for the importance of

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<sup>45</sup> Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders*, 45.

<sup>46</sup> Skidelsky, *Hopes Betrayed*, 175.

<sup>47</sup> Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders*.

historical specificity, local analysis, and concrete realities of Keynes's life. Transnational feminist theory calls us to question our bias and positionality when reading, writing, and understanding history.

Using liberal/socialist feminism, standpoint theory, intersectionality, and transnational feminist theory to reread Keynes seems extensive. Why am I not using one type of feminist theory for this project? Simply put, feminist thought works best when it is in conversation with other types of feminist thought. Each theory relies on the others. For example, intersectionality is necessary to see multiplicity of identity, but if we do not hold it in conversation with a theory like socialist feminism, intersectionality is little more than naming identity devoid of political context. Additionally, transnational feminist theory points to the impact of colonialism, globalization, and neoliberalism on individuals across the world. However, without a connection to ideas of intersecting identities, individuals could be homogenized. Therefore, I use multiple feminist theories because feminism requires conversation across theory and difference.

### **Methodology**

My rereading of the life of Maynard Keynes is a methodological intervention. To begin, I use a wide range of sources to frame a biographical account of Keynes's life. First, I use Keynes's own writing, including his economic work, his correspondence, his speeches, and other tracts on political issues of the time. I also rely on secondary sources that frame Keynes's life, such as biographies written about his life, biographies written about his friends, an account written by his mother, works by his contemporaries, and commentary on Keynes by his friends from their essays, diary entries, and conversations. Taken together, these sources create an outline of Keynes's life.

However, relying on previous biographical scholarship has its drawbacks. Every scholar brings bias to their work, regardless if they are conscious of doing so. Because of this, I view Keynes's life as a project. Intersectional feminist Barbara Smith emphasizes the importance of viewing history as a project and points to the subjectivity of its viewers. She states, "everything that human beings participate in is ultimately subjective and biased, and there is nothing inherently wrong with that."<sup>48</sup> I recognize my own subjectivity as a feminist scholar rereading Keynes's life through a feminist lens. I argue that not only is there nothing wrong with my subjectivity, but objectivity in writing a life is not possible. When reviewing a life, biographers must determine what deserves emphasis. In doing so, we must decide what to center and what to push to the periphery. This makes the telling of history a subjective process.

Keynes scholars have had ample material for study. His life has been examined, his work has been analyzed repeatedly, and his relationships have been documented in many forms. What does my project offer that many others preceding it do not? First, I emphasize Keynes's life without an explicit focus on his economic theory. Many biographers of Keynes's life argue that he maintained explicit separation of his personal life from his work life. For example, Robert Skidelsky's multi-volume biography of Keynes is the most complete account of Keynes's life in existence, and the biography positions Keynes as fractured—having separate but parallel lives.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Richard Davenport-Hines views Keynes as having separate interests that he kept detached from one another.<sup>50</sup> I intervene by arguing that Keynes's life experiences were tied to his beliefs and economic work. Without his specific lived experiences, he may not have created

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<sup>48</sup> Smith, *Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around*, 106.

<sup>49</sup> Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes: The Economist as Savior 1920-1937*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 3.

<sup>50</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines, *The Universal Man: The Life of John Maynard Keynes*, (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

the theory he did. Although Keynes is best known for his economic theory, we can learn much more about him and his life by connecting his personal beliefs with political activity and examining the ways Keynes's life experiences informed his work.

Second, as mentioned above, I avoid claims of creating a "true" or "objective" history. This inherently feminist intervention is significant to my project because it allows me to question past scholarship, ask questions that have not been asked, and argue that my intervention is not fundamentally more biased or less objective than any currently in existence. Using feminist postmodernist thought, I view my rereading of Keynes as framed by my subjectivity.

Hawkesworth explains the importance of grappling with claims of truth, by discussing the ways some feminists see "the self as an unstable constellation of unconscious desires, fears, phobias, and conflicting linguistic, social, and political forces."<sup>51</sup> Because of this, all work is inherently biased by the scholar who produces it. Hawkesworth goes on to explain that "in raising different questions, challenging received views, refocusing research agendas, and searching for methods of investigation adequate to the problems of feminist scholarship, feminists contribute to the development of a more sophisticated understanding of human cognition."<sup>52</sup> Thus, as a methodological intervention, I own my subjectivity and use it to raise new questions and challenge the "objectivity" of past scholarship on Keynes.

Lastly, and most importantly, my project makes a methodological intervention by directly incorporating feminist theory and analysis. I use feminist theories such as standpoint and intersectionality to argue for the importance of connecting Keynes's lived experiences to his work. I do not want to simply "add feminism and stir," but develop a more complete, more nuanced understanding of Keynes, and to make an argument that Keynes, like every human

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<sup>51</sup> Hawkesworth, 67.

<sup>52</sup> Hawkesworth, 67.

being, had beliefs and lived experiences that directly connected to, and may have even helped produce, the theories he constructed.

### **Positioning Keynes**

Although Keynes was male, an academic, and an economist, he was not separated from the “woman question.” We can see this connection in a few ways. First, he held close relationships with feminist women. As a member of the Bloomsbury Group, Keynes regularly spent time with Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf. Both women were artists in a time when most women were not readily accepted into the arts. Woolf wrote specifically about women’s rights in her work.<sup>53</sup> Keynes not only read these works, but offered comments and critiques about them.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, his mother, Florence Keynes, was an active volunteer and an eventual political candidate.<sup>55</sup> Thus, Keynes was continuously surrounded by women who were not only aware of gender inequalities, but actively working to dismantle them.

Keynes himself wrote specifically about the “woman question” on multiple occasions. For example, in “Am I A Liberal?,” Keynes argued that the state’s position on birth control, divorce, and “sexual abnormalities” was out of touch with the lived realities of the larger population.<sup>56</sup> Although this statement has been read as simply an example of Keynes trying to push a political agenda<sup>57</sup> it is much more than that. Keynes was influenced by the relationships and identities he held. If we posit that his argument for economic independence, the right of divorce, and birth control for women was not central to his belief system, we miss the connections that arise from his lived experience and his arguments in favor of the “woman

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<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Woolf’s *Three Guineas*, and *A Room of One’s Own*.

<sup>54</sup> Davenport-Hines, *The Universal Man*, 129, 259.

<sup>55</sup> Florence Ada Keynes, *Gathering Up the Threads*, (Cambridge, England: W. Heffer & Sons, Ltd. 1950), 90.

<sup>56</sup> John Maynard Keynes, *The Essential Keynes*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 62.

<sup>57</sup> Zygmund Dobbs, *Keynes at Harvard: Economic Deception as a Political Credo*, (New York: Probe Researchers Inc., 1962).

question.” As I will discuss more in the following chapters, his beliefs on the necessity of women’s rights did not stop at “Am I a Liberal?” In 1907, he helped run a meeting of the Society for Women’s Suffrage,<sup>58</sup> in 1921 he wrote a letter in the *Cambridge Review* deploring the lack of college educational opportunities for women,<sup>59</sup> and in 1925 he gave a pro-birth control speech in Moscow,<sup>60</sup> to name a few examples. His beliefs on the rights of women were not peripheral; we see Keynes repeatedly activating on behalf of women throughout his life. As I mention above, many socialist British feminists of the early 1900s, including Fawcett, Gilman, and Goldman, held the same opinions on the importance of birth control, women’s economic independence, and women’s suffrage.<sup>61</sup> Thus, Keynes’s opinions on these subjects aligned with feminist beliefs of the time.

However, as I have briefly touched upon, Keynes’s beliefs were not without fault. In many ways he held elitist, racist, and colonialist views. Unfortunately, these beliefs were not inconsistent with the feminism of the time. Many liberal Western feminists were consumed with the idea of being “white saviors” who could enter the communities of those in colonized areas in order to bring religion and “civilization” to the uncivilized, poor peoples who so desperately needed it.<sup>62</sup> Keynes’s own mother subscribed to this form of feminism. Florence served as member of a Charity Society and was also connected with the Public Service and Magistrates Committee of the National Council of Women that did public service work all over England.<sup>63</sup> This type of volunteer work served as a way white, middle-class women could begin to make a

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<sup>58</sup> Skidelsky, *Hopes Betrayed*, 179.

<sup>59</sup> Atsushi Komine, *Keynes and His Contemporaries: Tradition and Enterprise in the Cambridge School of Economics*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), 105.

<sup>60</sup> Davenport-Hines, 242.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, Fawcett’s *Essays and Lectures*.

<sup>62</sup> Mann, 309.

<sup>63</sup> Florence Ada Keynes, *Gathering Up the Threads: A Study in Family Biography*, (Cambridge, England: W. Heffer & Sons Ltd., 1950), 93.



place in the public sphere. Thus, Keynes's beliefs that seem problematic today dovetailed neatly with the feminism of his time.

## **Outline**

Using feminist theory, histories of Keynes, and feminist methodological interventions, my project creates a feminist rereading of Keynes's life and work. First, I combine pieces of multiple biographies of Keynes to build a more complete understanding of his life. This analysis is also important as it points to the biases present in each of the biographies. I look at the ways each biography fails to account for pieces of Keynes's life, and the ways this failure points to the agenda of the author. I do this not to argue that my biography is the most complete or most objective, but instead to argue that all biographers bring themselves to the work. Thus, critiques of past biographies help me to argue that seeing Keynes's life and the ways his personal life impacted his work and politics requires a feminist methodology, which is not often incorporated by white, male, heterosexual biographers.

Second, I employ the same tactics to examine specific facets of Keynes life, including his sexuality, his relationships to feminist women, and his interest in the stories of others. I bring these experiences and relationships to the center to portray the importance they had on his life. In doing so, I argue that no individual can separate their lived experiences from their professional and political ideas. Keynes's interconnected identities, relationships, and experiences all influenced his beliefs. Thus, instead of employing a tactic of analyzing Keynes's personal life and professional life separately, I argue that in order to understand either, one has to look at them in conversation with each other.

Third, I argue for the importance of using feminist theory to analyze Keynes's life. Without feminist theory, some of Keynes's actions can seem like a series of events based on

coincidence and accident. Feminist analysis helps me to understand how Keynes's life was filled with interconnected events and decisions that stemmed from lived experiences, relationships, and his own identities. If, as biographers, our goal is to simply lay out a life history with emphasis on specific events, we are apt to betray bias in focusing on which events we deem significant. A feminist analysis of Keynes's life explicitly names my personal bias as a feminist, but also presents the importance of valuing different events, relationships, and identities as significant.

Lastly, I suggest that this project be enhanced by further scholarship. This work is not meant to stand alone. While this thesis focuses specifically on Keynes's life, future scholarship should add to this project by rereading his work using feminist theory. Additionally, feminist rereadings should also focus on the lives of other historical economists, such as Ricardo, Smith, Pigou, Hume, and many others. Feminist rereadings ensure that we understand the lived experiences and subjectivities of those who created canonical scholarship. What follows in this project will be a deeper analysis of the connections between what Keynes believed and the ways it was tied to his lived experiences. Furthermore, I argue that employing feminist analysis in the rereading of the life and work of economists allows us to connect the personal to the political. This has larger impacts on both biography and economics.

## Chapter 2:

### The Life, Sexuality, and Relationships of Keynes

Maynard Keynes was not universally liked. Mostly, people felt strongly in either direction; they either enjoyed his company or found him insufferable. In some instances, individuals felt both simultaneously. Accounts of his life are quite charged with the impressions left by him. Bertrand Russell said of Keynes that when arguing “with him, I felt that I took my life in my hands, and I seldom emerged without feeling something of a fool.”<sup>64</sup> Kingsley Martin, editor of the *New Statesman* and *Nation*, wrote in an obituary of Keynes that he “was the most formidable of antagonists, ruthless and sometimes unscrupulous in argument, and always unsparing of all that seemed to him silly and insincere.”<sup>65</sup> The negative impressions are numerous. Keynes was often terse and self-assured, which was off-putting to many.

Others note his off-putting nature, but focus on his warmth, affection, and interest in everyone. Keynes was a member of the Bloomsbury Group where he was intimate with Virginia Woolf and her sister, Vanessa Bell, E.M. Forster, Duncan Grant, Lytton Strachey, Leonard Woolf, and many others.<sup>66</sup> Bloomsbury was a network close relationships based on shared interest, attitudes, and love of conversation.<sup>67</sup> Though his Bloomsbury friends noted the negative aspects, many point to the positive. For example, Clive Bell, husband to Vanessa Bell, and member of the Bloomsbury Group, noted “his supreme virtue was his deeply affectionate nature.

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<sup>64</sup> Milo Keynes, “Maynard and Lydia Keynes,” in *Essays on John Maynard Keynes* ed. by Milo Keynes, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 4.

<sup>65</sup> M. Keynes, 4.

<sup>66</sup> Frances Spalding, *The Bloomsbury Group: National Portrait Gallery Insights*, (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2005), 5.

<sup>67</sup> Spalding, *The Bloomsbury Group*, 7.

He liked a great many people of all sorts and to them he gave pleasure, excitement and good counsel; but his dearest friends he loved passionately and faithfully and, odd as it may sound, with a touch of humility.”<sup>68</sup> Clive and Vanessa Bell’s son, Quentin, also expressed fond, and somewhat silly, memories of Keynes. In one instance while driving with Keynes, Quentin explains that Keynes felt the pedestrians were too unhappy. “He decided to cheer them up...he leant out over the side of the vehicle and, raising his hat, serious, concerned, he addressed a prosperous looking citizen: ‘Excuse me, Sir, excuse me, but I am afraid that you’ve lost your sense of personal identity.’”<sup>69</sup> Even Leonard Woolf, who had a rocky relationship with Keynes,<sup>70</sup> posthumously described him as having “the most extraordinary good mind. Frightfully quick, terrifically quick, incisive, and also an imaginative way of looking at economics which seems to be almost impossible.”<sup>71</sup>

These posthumous descriptions of Keynes’s character make clear that Keynes brought his entire self to his interactions with others. He acted on his beliefs and did not hold back out of cordiality. While this meant he sometimes came across as a flip-flopper (his views evolved over time), it also meant that individuals always knew where Keynes stood. Considering his ample correspondence with his friends, family, and work associates, his opinions were extensive.

In this chapter, I look at the life of Maynard Keynes. I start with a brief summary of his life before centering on a few main points. I spend the bulk of this chapter discussing Keynes and queerness, his relationships with women, and Keynes’s connection to the lived realities of the

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<sup>68</sup> Clive Bell, *Old Friends: Personal Reflections*, (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1957), 61.

<sup>69</sup> Quentin Bell, *Bloomsbury Recalled*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 90.

<sup>70</sup> Felix refers to Leonard’s feelings toward Keynes as “half-damped dislike and disapproval,” (175) and suggests this could be due to Lytton Strachey trying to turn Leonard and other Bloomsbury members against Keynes after Keynes and Duncan Grant became lovers (101-102). I would also suggest the rockiness could be partially caused by Keynes’s anti-Semitism, which I will discuss later in this chapter and in chapter three.

<sup>71</sup> “The Grand Experiment,” *Great Thinkers: In Their Own Words*, directed by John Mullen (London: BBC, 2011), DVD.

marginalized. I aim to move what is commonly known about Keynes to the margins, and to center his peripheral characteristics. While I recognize that this does not present a thorough biography, my discussion produces a more nuanced, feminist approach to understanding Keynes.

## **Biography**

John Maynard Keynes was born June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1883 in Cambridge, England. Born to John Neville Keynes, a lecturer in logic and political economy at Cambridge University, and Florence Ada Keynes, a college-educated and social/political activist, Maynard was the first of three children. Margaret was born in 1885 and Geoffrey followed in 1887. Sickly in his first year, Maynard had health conditions for much of his life.<sup>72</sup> He was close to his parents, and they fostered his interests and education whenever possible. Maynard's education began early, and he was an avid reader from an early age. He was enrolled in a preparatory school at age eight, with an eventual goal of winning a scholarship to Eton College.<sup>73</sup>

At Eton Keynes began to develop as an individual and as a scholar. He continually won prizes for academic achievement, began to study extracurricular topics, played sports, and developed his first close friendships.<sup>74</sup> It was toward the end of his time at Eton that he wrote to his father wishing a day had 36 hours in order to fit in all of his interests.<sup>75</sup> This attitude continued throughout Keynes's life. He would much rather have talked to too many people, read too many things, or experienced too much rather than centered his focus on one topic.

In his last year at Eton he won a scholarship to King's College at Cambridge. While Eton began Keynes's development, Cambridge intensified and accelerated it. Instructed by individuals

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<sup>72</sup> Charles Hession, *John Maynard Keynes: A Personal Biography of the Man Who Revolutionized Capitalism and the Way We Live*, (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1984), 8.

<sup>73</sup> Hession, 16.

<sup>74</sup> Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes: Hopes Betrayed: 1883-1920*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 74-105.

<sup>75</sup> Skidelsky, *Hopes Betrayed*, 96.

who enhanced his academic and philosophical perspectives, Keynes again refused to focus solely on one topic.<sup>76</sup> Perhaps because of the combination of his academic achievement and his multitudinous interests, he was chosen to be part of a secret society of sorts, named the Apostles. The Apostles impacted Keynes in countless ways, but the two most obvious were the friendships he made and the values he adopted. In many cases these friendships continued through his entire life, turned intimate, and shaped his relationships to come. The values Keynes received from the Apostles came largely from G. E. Moore's opus, *Principia Ethica*.<sup>77</sup>

Moore published *Principia Ethica* in 1903, at the beginning of Keynes's second year at Cambridge. *Principia* and Moore's philosophies on goodness, knowledge, beauty, and friendship had a drastic impact on Keynes. Keynes wrote of *Principia Ethica* in his essay "My Early Beliefs" positing:

Its effect on *us*, and the talk which preceded and followed it, dominated, and perhaps still dominate, everything else. We were at an age when our beliefs influenced our behavior, a characteristic of the young which it is easy for the middle-aged to forget, and the habits of feeling formed then still persist in a recognisable degree.<sup>78</sup>

Every biographer of Keynes notes the importance of Moore's ideas on Keynes. Of *Principia*, Davenport-Hines states, "It came on him, and on his fellow Apostles, as a revelation that dominated their hearts and minds."<sup>79</sup> Skidelsky defines Moore's philosophy in a few points: the indefinability of good, the assertion that the only things inherently valuable are states of mind, and the idea that right actions are actions that perpetuate good.<sup>80</sup> Basically, Moore argued that "goodness" was indefinable and individually defined. He emphasized aesthetic values such as beauty, pleasure, nature, and friendship. These values had a huge impact on Keynes and the

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<sup>76</sup> Skidelsky, *Hopes Betrayed*, 112.

<sup>77</sup> Mark Blaug, *John Maynard Keynes: Life, Ideas, Legacy*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 4.

<sup>78</sup> John Maynard Keynes, *The Essential Keynes*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 13.

<sup>79</sup> Davenport-Hines, *Universal Man*, 57.

<sup>80</sup> Skidelsky, *Hopes Betrayed*, 139-140.

Apostles and, as Keynes explains, “It was all under the influence of Moore’s method, according to which you could hope to make essentially vague notions clear by using precise language about them and asking exact questions. It was a method of discovery by the instrument of impeccable grammar and an unambiguous dictionary.”<sup>81</sup> Moore’s aesthetic values and method of clarity stuck with Keynes through the rest of his life.

At the end of his time at Cambridge, Keynes took the Civil Service Examination. He came second and was placed at the India Office. The work he was assigned there bored him. He found it monotonous and often complained that officials rarely took initiative or admitted making mistakes.<sup>82</sup> Though the work was boring, he did not disagree with its imperialist foundations. As Skidelsky points out, “his attitude to British rule was conventional...in short, introduce good government to places which could not develop it on their own.”<sup>83</sup> With so little to keep him occupied, Keynes used his time at the India Office to work on his *Treatise on Probability*. In it, he argued that individuals view probability subjectively. Mark Blaug explains, “it depicted probability as a degree of confidence in rationally held beliefs and not as an objective frequency of occurrence of actual events.”<sup>84</sup> Although the *Treatise* did not help him to obtain the fellowship he desired, he was eventually able to return to academics and leave the India Office. In 1908, he was offered a lectureship in Economics at King’s College.

Before the start of the First World War, Keynes taught economics in a manner typical of the time. He adhered to classical theory, gave lectures, and tutored students. He was averse to the use of statistical models and largely relied on theoretical approaches to economic theory. Keynes was also committed to the idea of free trade. Skidelsky explains that “he regarded the case for

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<sup>81</sup> John Maynard Keynes, *The Essential Keynes*, 17.

<sup>82</sup> Davenport-Hines, 68-69.

<sup>83</sup> Skidelsky, *Hope Betrayed*, 176.

<sup>84</sup> Blaug, 4.

free trade as scientifically established.”<sup>85</sup> Essentially, in the years leading up to the First World War, Keynes had no reason to go against economic canon.

During this transition from King’s to the India Office and back to King’s, Keynes had a few intimate relationships with other men. First, as Jeffrey Escoffier describes, the friendship between fellow Apostle Lytton Strachey and Keynes grew “increasingly intimate, encouraged by the Apostles’ ethos of complete candor...soon after discovering that they were both sexually attracted to men, Strachey and Keynes had a short affair.”<sup>86</sup> This was ended when they both expressed interest in another man, Arthur Hobhouse; Keynes and Hobhouse had a brief affair.<sup>87</sup> In 1908, Keynes met Strachey’s ex-lover, Duncan Grant. Grant was Keynes’s great love, and they had a long, significant relationship, much to Strachey’s chagrin.

Also during this time, Keynes and his friends began to “live more and more of their lives in relationship to a circle of writers and artists.”<sup>88</sup> The Bloomsbury Group was born, and brought with it a change in Keynes’s personal life. Roy Harrod argues that although “he lived as a bachelor in college for part of the time...Bloomsbury was in a very real sense his home.”<sup>89</sup> Bloomsbury was a group of friends where “the stress placed on personal affection, esthetic enjoyment, candor in expressing one’s feelings and thought, clarity in reasoning, and a sense of being different from others”<sup>90</sup> provided Keynes’s with belonging outside of the academy.

In 1914, with the start of the First World War, Keynes began his involvement in the creation of economic policy and theory. He became integral to the Treasury during the war,

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<sup>85</sup> Skidelsky, *Hopes Betrayed*, 227.

<sup>86</sup> Jeffrey Escoffier, *Lives of Notable Gay Men and Lesbians: John Maynard Keynes*, (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1995), 30.

<sup>87</sup> Escoffier, 32.

<sup>88</sup> Escoffier, 41.

<sup>89</sup> Harrod, 178.

<sup>90</sup> Charles Hession, 99.



advising on the gold standard and issues of internal and external finance. Keynes mainly wanted to limit the effects of war. As Skidelsky states, Keynes “appreciate[d] the impact of domestic policy on external finance” and was anxious about how the war would affect his friends, which led to him “favour[ing] a war of subsidies, not of great armies.”<sup>91</sup> As part of his duties, he made his first trip to the United States in 1917 and was not impressed. His views on the U.S. were not favorable and, as Davenport-Hines states, he “tended to see the United States as a philistine and mechanized hell-hole, where size, speed and money were fetishized.”<sup>92</sup> His view of the U.S. did not change throughout his life.

As the war ended, Keynes found himself taking part in the Paris Peace Conference. He was discouraged. Keynes viewed the reparations being asked of Germany as impossible and thought they would cause misery, poverty, starvation, and death. He wrote to Grant, “if I were in the Germans’ place I’d die rather than sign such a Peace...meanwhile there is no food or employment anywhere...I sit in my room hour after hour receiving deputations from the new nations, who all ask not for food or raw materials, but primarily for instruments of murder against their neighbours. And with such a Peace as the basis I see no hope anywhere.”<sup>93</sup>

His belief in the failure of the peace conference led him to publish the work that made him famous: *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*. Skidelsky argues that this book “turn[ed] attention from great power politics to the conditions of economic prosperity. Keynes put economics on the map for the informed general public.”<sup>94</sup> In lucid, passionate, and often angry language, Keynes eviscerated the outcome of the peace conference. He believed that making Germany destitute did little to aid in rebuilding Europe, instead viewing a robust German

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<sup>91</sup> Skidelsky, *Hopes Betrayed*, 307.

<sup>92</sup> Davenport-Hines, 91.

<sup>93</sup> Skidelsky, *Hopes Betrayed*, 371.

<sup>94</sup> Robert Skidelsky, *Keynes*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 21.

economy as necessary to a prosperous European economy. Also, *Economic Consequences* included Keynes's descriptions of world leaders' mannerisms and was written as if to give others an inside look at the conference.

Post-WWI, Keynes continued lecturing at King's and began speculating in various goods markets in which he often lost money. The postwar depression of the early '20s, the high unemployment rate, and the great depression of the late '20s/early '30s greatly impacted the way Keynes viewed economics. He wrote of his ideas on deflation, returning to the gold standard, and unemployment in many publications, including the *Nation*. In 1923, he published *A Tract on Monetary Reform*, in which he argued for the importance of using monetary policy to stabilize the price level.<sup>95</sup> In *A Tract* he also argued against the gold standard, which he believed would allow Britain to independently manage its monetary affairs.<sup>96</sup>

It was during this time that Keynes met, and fell in love with, Lydia Lopokova. They had met previously, but Keynes fell in love with her 1921. A Russian ballerina, Lydia was an unusual choice for an economist who friends knew to be a relatively out gay man (by the standards of the day; male homosexuality was a crime in England). They were married in 1925 and, as many biographers have noted, "It was [Lydia's] talent for *living* that made her such a great life's companion for Maynard."<sup>97</sup> Though Maynard loved Lydia very deeply, his friends were not as enamored. As Davenport-Hines notes, "Vanessa Bell, in particular, was annoyed by her chatter, inane jokes and time-wasting."<sup>98</sup> But Lydia was there to stay, and she provided Keynes with a partnership and love that lasted for the rest of his life.

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<sup>95</sup> Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes: The Economist as Savior: 1920-1937*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 153.

<sup>96</sup> Skidelsky, *Economist as Savior*, 158.

<sup>97</sup> David Felix, *Keynes: A Critical Life*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenway Press, 1999), 184.

<sup>98</sup> Davenport-Hines, 240.

Keynes continued his economic shift by developing a critique of laissez-faire throughout the 1920s. He was not a socialist, but understood “the diseases of modern capitalism.”<sup>99</sup> In his essay “The End of Laissez-Faire,” Keynes argues “the world is *not* so governed from above that private and social interest always coincide...It is *not* a correct deduction from the principles of economics that enlightened self-interest always operates in the public interest.”<sup>100</sup> Thus, Keynes began to argue against the classical idea that free market forces merged public and private interests.

During this time of constant overwork, writing many tracts and essays, and advising on political and economic issues such as the coal miners’ strike, Keynes began to see how “economics as a guide to policy was useless unless it grasped the ‘nature of what is happening.’ ‘What is happening’ referred not just to events in the material world but also to people’s perceptions of those events.”<sup>101</sup> In 1930, Keynes published a book years in the making, *Treatise on Money*. It focuses on saving and investment,<sup>102</sup> the importance of price level stability,<sup>103</sup> and a comparison between ideal equilibrium and the forces creating disequilibrium.<sup>104</sup>

Appointed to the MacMillan Committee at the beginning of the Great Depression, Keynes “tried to get bankers, civil servants, and economists to rethink their principles.”<sup>105</sup> Many of his suggestions would become central to his principal work, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*. *The General Theory*, published in 1936, was written in response to global economic depression. Skidelsky explains, “it offered a systematic way of

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<sup>99</sup> Skidelsky, *Economist as Savior*, 222.

<sup>100</sup> J.M. Keynes, *The Essential Keynes*, 55.

<sup>101</sup> Skidelsky, *Economist as Savior*, 269.

<sup>102</sup> Harrod, 405.

<sup>103</sup> Hession, 246.

<sup>104</sup> J.M. Keynes, *The Essential Keynes*, 107-108.

<sup>105</sup> Skidelsky, *Economist as Savior*, 363.

thinking not just about behaviour of contemporary economies, but about the pitfalls in the quest for greater wealth at all times.”<sup>106</sup> One of the main points in the book is that modern capitalism is plagued by unemployment caused by a deficiency in aggregate demand in the spending by consumers and investors.<sup>107</sup> It is an analysis of the short period and a critique of classical economic theory. In it, Keynes “advocate[s] a measure of government intervention to achieve greater economic stability and full employment.”<sup>108</sup> At once criticized and hailed as revolutionary, *The General Theory* upended conventional economic theory and discussion.

During much of his life, Keynes was prey to illness. He was frequently ill as a child, and possibly due to this, developed illnesses more regularly as an adult. Keynes contracted influenza in 1908, and subsequently in 1913, Keynes contracted tonsillitis and “quinsy” which led to diphtheria.<sup>109</sup> This was a serious illness and he was forced to spend over a month under a doctor’s care. In the spring of 1937, Keynes was feeling ill, breathless, and had chest discomfort. Days later, he consulted a doctor, his uncle Walter Langdon-Brown. However, while seeking treatment he “suffered a thrombosis of a coronary artery.”<sup>110</sup> His heart was permanently weakened, and he became even more susceptible to illness for the rest of his life. Lydia took it upon herself to make sure Maynard rested and took care of himself. Without diligent care, Keynes most likely would have died of a heart attack before the end of the Second World War.

With the onset of the Second World War, Keynes concerned himself with how to pay for the war. He was not offered a government position, but that did not stop him from writing tracts, letters, and memoranda about his opinions on domestic and foreign economic policy. He devised

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<sup>106</sup> Skidelsky, *Keynes*, 77.

<sup>107</sup> Blaug, 11.

<sup>108</sup> Hession, 285.

<sup>109</sup> Hession, 91.

<sup>110</sup> Hession, 302.

a plan for “compulsory savings” as a way to obtain resources for the war without inflation, which worked by “siphoning off the excess purchasing power”<sup>111</sup> through a “levy upon wage-packets in return for an undertaking to repay later.”<sup>112</sup>

The last five years of his life saw him as integral to international relations between Britain and her allies, especially the United States. He visited the U.S. a few times during the war, which was both stressful and bothersome to him. Keynes was there to negotiate for wartime loans and the ensuing turmoil of the end of the war, and he continued to feel the balance of power shifting from Britain to the United States. During the First World War he had written to his mother that, “in another year’s time we shall have forfeited the claim we had staked out in the New World and in exchange this country will be mortgaged to America.”<sup>113</sup> The Second World War did not change his mind.

Following the war, Keynes was involved in the Bretton Woods talks and the creation of the IMF and World Bank. His proposal was at odds with the American proposal put forward by Harry Dexter White. Keynes held that “the smaller the resources of the Fund, the larger must be the latitude give to members to do what they wanted.”<sup>114</sup> Keynes advocated for financial bodies to aid struggling countries in order to help maintain global economic stability. But this was not to be. “Keynes still hankered for his mode of an International Credit Union, acting as an international lender of last resort, with a bias toward expansion, whereas the Americans wanted an interventionist body which coordinated monetary policies globally and implemented ambitious financial schemes.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Hession, 314.

<sup>112</sup> Harrod, 492.

<sup>113</sup> Davenport-Hines, 92.

<sup>114</sup> Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes: Fighting for Freedom: 1937-1946*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 310.

<sup>115</sup> Davenport-Hines, 354-355.

Although his negotiations with the United States did not often result in many gains for Britain, Keynes argued for less interventionist, less Americanized international financial institutions and the negotiation of favorable post-war terms for Britain. The work he put into the last few years of the war and the subsequent post-war negotiations took a toll on his health. While walking the downs by Tilton, his estate near Sussex, Keynes suffered another heart attack. And on Easter Sunday in 1946, Maynard Keynes died with his mother and Lydia by his side.

This brief biographical sketch of Keynes, though by no means complete, serves to introduce a general understanding of who Keynes was, what was important to him, and the trajectory of his life and work. In the sections that follow, I discuss some of his specific experiences in order to point to their centrality in his life.

### **Keynes and Sexuality**

Keynes was bisexual. He slept with and had intimate relationships with many men throughout his life and eventually married a woman. Almost every biography written about Keynes, with the exception of Harrod's official biography, mentions his sexuality. However, discussion of Keynes's sexuality is often compartmentalized away from his public and academic persona. Some even use Freudian analysis to provide root causes of his sexuality.<sup>116</sup> Here, I lay out the arc of his sexuality throughout his life, focusing solely on his intimate relationships.

In 1895, when Keynes was 12 years old, Oscar Wilde was prosecuted for homosexuality. The trial was widely publicized; Wilde was eventually found guilty of "gross indecency" and was sentenced to two years of hard labor.<sup>117</sup> While we cannot know whether Keynes was aware of this trial as it was going on, it had a profound effect on English life. First, it portrayed the stigma and profound disgust English society had toward gayness. Second, it demonstrated what

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<sup>116</sup> Felix, Hession.

<sup>117</sup> Escoffier, 22.

could happen in England if one displayed and owned up to one's queerness. It was not safe to be openly gay or queer in English society during that time. As Escoffier points out, "over the next few years Keynes would discover his own homosexual feeling; and that he, like anyone who had homosexual feelings during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, would grow up bearing the burden of society's hostility toward and stigma attached to those feelings."<sup>118</sup>

Keynes's sexuality first appears in letters he wrote from his time at Eton. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the all-male schools were often considered to be "hotbeds of homosexual activity."<sup>119</sup> While the accuracy of this thought is unclear, Keynes did find the all-male school to be a happy place to begin his sexual experiences. His first mention of sexuality is in a note written to a friend of "the astounding...goings on of my circle during the last year at school...walks in which the doctrine of the Resurrection of the body alternated with the problem as to whether a kiss shd. [sic] be followed by a cop."<sup>120</sup> Thus, in his early teens, Keynes could be found discussing kissing and sexuality with close Eton friends.

As his time at Eton wore on, Keynes developed deep feelings for his classmate, B.W. Swithinbank. He wrote affectionate letters to him, often referring to him in "terms of endearment and love."<sup>121</sup> This love remained platonic, and eventually Keynes developed emotional and physical intimacy with Dilwyn Knox in 1901. Dilly, as he was affectionately known, was Keynes's first sexual encounter, and years later he referred to it as an "experiment" in conversation with both Duncan Grant and Swithinbank.<sup>122</sup> After Dilly, "Keynes's second Eton boyfriend was Daniel Macmillan."<sup>123</sup> Although their relationship ended in 1902 when they left

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<sup>118</sup> Escoffier, 23-24.

<sup>119</sup> Escoffier, 24.

<sup>120</sup> Felix, 49.

<sup>121</sup> Hession, 33.

<sup>122</sup> Hession, 33.

<sup>123</sup> Davenport-Hines, 205.

Eton, Macmillan published all of Keynes's work, and Keynes describes meeting up with Macmillan again, saying "we sat on a sofa together and things ended in only a semi-embrace, but I could have done anything—if only I had the nerve."<sup>124</sup> Eton, for Keynes, was a place in which he could bring his whole self to his interactions. Thus, the sexual experiences and awakening of Keynes's time at Eton led into his adult sexual life.

Significantly and somewhat unusually, the information we get about Keynes's sexual activity starting in 1901 and continuing to his marriage to Lydia comes from Keynes himself. Davenport-Hines notes an archival record where we can find "a list of sexual partners, identified by their initials and years, which he compiled in 1915 or 1916, and which was released in to the Keynes archive at King's years after the bulk of his papers were accessioned."<sup>125</sup> This list identifies no one by name, but we can extrapolate based on what we know about Keynes. What is apparent is that Keynes began sexual activity with Dilly in 1901 and then was sexually abstinent from 1903-1905.

While at Cambridge, Keynes had numerous other intimate relationships. However, as a member of the Apostles, Keynes was constantly aware of sexual stigma. The Apostles held a notion of high sodomy, in which "the love of man for man, when it precluded sexual acts, surpassed the love of man for woman."<sup>126</sup> Sexual acts between men was "lower sodomy," and as the name suggests, made one less than a high sodomite. In 1906, Keynes had three partners: Lytton Strachey, James Strachey, and Arthur Hobhouse. Davenport-Hines suggests they had thought of the importance of being discreet, positing "they made a safe quartet, all of them

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<sup>124</sup> Davenport-Hines, 205.

<sup>125</sup> Davenport-Hines, 204.

<sup>126</sup> Davenport-Hines, 208.



Apostles, who kept one another's secrets. They were, in this phase, experimenters, who knew that if experiments are to have value, they must be repeated and refined."<sup>127</sup>

Before entering the India Office, Keynes again became intimate with Dan Macmillan. But this was frustratingly platonic, with Keynes writing to Strachey, "I have always suffered and I suppose I always will from the most unalterable obsession that I am so physically repulsive that I've no business to hurl my body on anyone else's."<sup>128</sup> After this ended, he moved to London where his sexuality became more fraught due to the increased anxiety of discovery. Escoffier argues that the move to London, "along with his civil service job, made Keynes very nervous about the prospect of his homosexuality being discovered... He had a number of scares of being found out."<sup>129</sup> This included one where a compromising letter written by him was returned to the India Office. Fortunately, he opened it before anyone else could. He was forced to be careful, and "he led a double life in which only his friends, mostly other homosexuals, were aware of his sexual orientation."<sup>130</sup>

During his time at the India Office, Keynes fell in love and began one of the most important relationships of his life. He met Duncan Grant in 1908, and as Grant had just ended an affair with Lytton Strachey, Keynes had to proceed discreetly. Eventually Strachey discovered them, and as Michael Holroyd, Strachey's biographer, explains, "of all the darkly amorous crises sprinkled throughout [Strachey's] life, this was perhaps the most wretched."<sup>131</sup> Keynes felt terrible about the pain he caused Strachey, and although Lytton tried to put on a brave face, he never really forgave Keynes.

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<sup>127</sup> Davenport-Hines, 209-210.

<sup>128</sup> Escoffier, 35.

<sup>129</sup> Escoffier, 36.

<sup>130</sup> Escoffier, 36.

<sup>131</sup> Michael Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: A Critical Biography*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 338.

Keynes's love for Duncan was vast, and he committed himself completely to Duncan. Their surviving correspondence is littered with examples of this commitment. With quips like, "I shan't be really happy until I see you again," and "I love you too much and I can't now bear to live without you,"<sup>132</sup> it is clear his love for Duncan was foremost on his mind. They lived together for a short time, and took a vacation at the end of 1908 where Keynes spent possibly the happiest two months of his life.<sup>133</sup> However, this did not mean he was exclusively in a relationship with Duncan. Grant was not a monogamous type of companion, and Keynes followed his lead. The list of Keynes's lovers starts in 1905 with four names and increases drastically over the next few years. In his first year with Duncan, Keynes listed 61 encounters with other men, and the following year 1909-1910 he listed 65 encounters.

The list reads almost anonymously and portrays what little information Keynes knew about some of his lovers. For example, some of the entries include, "Stable Boy of Park Lane," "The young American near the British Museum," "the beautiful young man in the P. shed," and "Jewboy."<sup>134</sup> He met these men at popular meeting places for men looking to pick up men, including sauna-baths, and both the Lover's Walk and a statue of muscly Achilles in Hyde Park.<sup>135</sup> Keynes had to be discreet as he needed to avoid close calls like the letter incident.

From 1910-1918 when Keynes met Lydia, he was consistently sexually active, and all with male companions. He continued to see Duncan into 1910 and they were sexually intimate, but neither belonged to the other anymore. Keynes was miserable about the break-up. He had a few other close relationships after his relationship with Grant ended, including George Nelson, Francis Birrell, Nigel Farnell, and Sidney Russell-Cooke. Although Keynes's close friends knew

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<sup>132</sup> Felix, 103-104.

<sup>133</sup> Skidelsky, *Hopes Betrayed*, 197.

<sup>134</sup> Davenport-Hines, 215-216.

<sup>135</sup> Davenport-Hines, 214.

of his love affairs with men, few knew of how active he was sexually, and his family seemed to be completely unaware. In 1910 he wrote to Duncan, “I had a dreadful conversation on Sunday with my mother and Margaret about marriage and had practically to admit to them what I was! How much they grasped I don’t know.”<sup>136</sup> Thus, Keynes was content with his sexual choices and was in love many times, but was aware of the practical necessity of secrecy.

During this period, Keynes and Grant had continued to live together. When their lease ended, Keynes moved into a flat and continued to pursue casual sex. However, “the landlady of the flat he had moved into after he and Grant split up had become suspicious of his sexual activities and had even hinted at blackmail.”<sup>137</sup> This led Keynes to move to another location where his sexual activities enjoyed less of an audience. It was during this time that Keynes developed his sexual activities list. He also “kept a numerical record of his...masturbations, and wet dreams...which obviously reflected Keynes’s pleasure and interest in both statistics and sex.”<sup>138</sup> He shared this list with very few people.

After about 16 years of almost exclusive sexual interactions with men (there are only a few recorded instances of sexual interaction with women, and Keynes did not seem to enjoy them), Keynes met Lydia Lopokova in 1918, and fell in love with her gradually over the next two years. Although he loved Lydia, Keynes was still romantically involved with men until 1921. As this was his first love experience with a woman, Keynes was unsure. Davenport-Hines suggests, “if it had not been for the example of Grant’s fulfilling affair with Vanessa Bell...it is doubtful that Keynes would have been inspired to pursue, set up home with and marry Lopokova.”<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Felix, 111.

<sup>137</sup> Escoffier, 66.

<sup>138</sup> Escoffier, 66.

<sup>139</sup> Davenport-Hines, 220.

Eventually, Lydia divorced her then husband and a few days later in 1925, she married Keynes. There is no documentation as to whether Keynes continued sexual relationships with men after his marriage. He was obviously in love with Lydia, and they corresponded frequently about their sexual life together. Their letters were intimate and often sexually explicit, including passages about kissing, licking, and touching one another. Although some instances existed at King's where Keynes would "wander into the room when [friends] were taking a bath" or give them "great smacking kisses,"<sup>140</sup> Keynes was monogamous with Lydia for the rest of his life.

Although his relationships with men and his casual sex had ended, Keynes continued to care about society's conservative views on sexuality. In the late 1930s when Keynes was chairman of the *New Statesman*, it was critiqued for carrying personal ads for men seeking men. He was unabashed, continued to publish the personal adds, and was satisfied that the *New Statesman* was a "recognized clearing-house for this type of 'personal.'"<sup>141</sup> This response is representative of Keynes's desire for openness about sexuality and sexual desire. Having dodged instances of blackmail and barely missed discovery on a few occasions, Keynes understood the challenges of "deviant sexuality", as it was then known. He remained supportive of non-normative sexualities throughout his life.

### **Keynes and Women**

Although Keynes spent much of his life surrounded by men, he had many strong connections to women and women's issues. Many biographers have written about Keynes's connections to Bloomsbury and a few mention his interest in helping friends with women's rights campaigns. However, I wish to specifically highlight these relationships and actions in order to point to their significance. In this section I present the relationships Keynes had with his

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<sup>140</sup> Felix, 201.

<sup>141</sup> Davenport-Hines, 244.

mother and female friends and his feelings toward women's issues like suffrage and birth control.

### Florence

Keynes's mother, Florence, was an activist and a politician. Florence had been fortunate enough to get an education that allowed her to attend Newnham College in 1878. She writes:

The Hall had been opened only three years earlier and accommodated only about thirty students; still it was very impressive to be in anything at all like a College. It is difficult to make young women of the present day, who have the satisfaction of complete membership of the University, realise the thrill it gave to their grandmothers to be allowed to come humbly to Cambridge for teaching on University lines, and the intense gratitude they felt towards those who had fought the battle for them.<sup>142</sup>

Her time at Newnham challenged her in many subjects and prepared her for her future in social work, activism, and politics. During this time she also met Maynard's father, Neville Keynes. After leaving Newnham, she was married to Neville in 1882. They settled at Harvey Road in Cambridge, where Florence made a place for herself in University society partaking in community events and even "start[ing] a book-club which ran for about twelve years."<sup>143</sup>

Florence had three children, and cared for them a great deal, but was not quite a doting mother. Although Florence loved and cared deeply for her children, Neville was the more doting of the two parents. Skidelsky explains, "she was more shy than was Neville about showing her feelings...as the children grew up his interests came to narrow increasingly on the family whereas hers broadened outwards to the community."<sup>144</sup> In her own book, *Gathering Up the Threads*, Florence speaks of motherhood and her children, but not at the expense of her own story. She had her own ambitions.

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<sup>142</sup> Florence Ada Keynes, *Gathering Up the Threads: A Study in Family Biography*, (Cambridge, England: W. Heffer & Sons LTD., 1950), 37.

<sup>143</sup> F.A. Keynes, 56.

<sup>144</sup> Skidelsky, *Hopes Betrayed*, 66.

In 1895, Florence became a founding member of the Charity Organization Society. “Deploring waste, confusion, insecurity and distress, she... began using her bracing virtuous intelligence to advance the education and health of girls and mothers.”<sup>145</sup> It was on this council that she began her activist career, which later bloomed into a political career. Neville was not completely supportive of this activism, journaling about his worry that it was too much for her and would worry her.<sup>146</sup> Florence did not heed his anxiety and instead continued her work.

After Maynard, Margaret, and Geoffrey were in school, Florence expanded her activist career. She explains, “my own outside work had been increasing and included membership of a committee set up to facilitate the starting of the Lloyd George scheme of Health Insurance... I was dealing at the time with the administration of medical relief under the Poor Law.”<sup>147</sup> Membership in this committee meant that Florence was hearing complaints between doctors and patients and attempting to correct them. Additionally, in the early 1900s she also aided in the creation of a youth employment agency and a home for tuberculosis sufferers.<sup>148</sup>

In 1914, Florence was nominated to be a Councilor with the Cambridge borough council. This was only possible through Florence’s tireless activism to get the “householder” clause amended. The clause only allowed those who owned a household to be Councilor, thus eliminating all women from contention except spinsters and widows. Her activism was responsible for getting the act changed and allowing her to become the first female Councilor.<sup>149</sup> In 1912, she helped form the National Union of Women Workers, even chairing the association

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<sup>145</sup> Davenport-Hines, 31.

<sup>146</sup> Felix, 14.

<sup>147</sup> F.A. Keynes, 82.

<sup>148</sup> Felix, 15.

<sup>149</sup> F.A. Keynes, 90.

for a period.<sup>150</sup> All this activism and policy work led to her being considered “the busiest woman in Cambridge” in 1916.<sup>151</sup>

Among the first women to be appointed as a magistrate in England after the Sex Disqualification Removal Act of 1919, she explains how the Act “had given women more freedom—freedom which could no longer be refused after the fine contribution made by them during the war.”<sup>152</sup> In the early 1920s, Florence joined the Magistrates Committee of the National Council of Women (NCW), which was “a committee of more than five hundred women engaged in public work in all parts of the country.”<sup>153</sup> She chaired this committee for 11 years and was president of the NCW for two years, 1930-1931. Following this, Florence was made Alderman of Cambridge in 1931 and in 1932, she was elected as the first female mayor of Cambridge.

Throughout all of Keynes’s adult life, he corresponded frequently with Florence. She read pages of his work, he read some of hers, and they were familiar with the public goings-on of one another. Keynes knew of his mother’s pursuits in social work, activism, and politics. Although we do not have the benefit of knowing what Keynes thought of his mother’s pursuits, it is by no means a stretch to say that he was influenced by her activities and her ideas.

### Bloomsbury Friends

While Florence was the most constant woman in Keynes’s life, he was also influenced by his deep and lasting friendships with Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell. Both women lived with Keynes at Gordon Square at some point, and they all shared their work and opinions with one

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<sup>150</sup> Felix, 15.

<sup>151</sup> Davenport-Hines, 32.

<sup>152</sup> F.A. Keynes, 93.

<sup>153</sup> F.A. Keynes, 93.

another. These two friendships challenged Keynes to think about women's issues both structurally and interpersonally.

Virginia Woolf was publicly supportive of women's rights and women social activists. She admired the work of women activists, but was also skeptical of them.<sup>154</sup> Part of this skepticism was because she was loath to do much outside activism herself. But her work and her activities show her to be a feminist, even if she did not use the term to describe herself. Both of her tracts, *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*, argue for the importance of women's rights and independence. Virginia believed in the necessity of economic independence for women. In the late 1910s, she "organized and chaired monthly meetings of the Richmond Branch of the Women's Cooperative Guild. She did this for four years."<sup>155</sup> She was often critical of what the women got out of attending such meetings, but she recognized their "desire for 'something beyond the daily life.'"<sup>156</sup> Virginia had felt firsthand the troubles of being a woman writer in a patriarchal society, and through her actions and writing she strove to work against gender assumptions.

Virginia and Keynes were not the closest of the Bloomsbury friends, comparatively. But they regularly met, corresponded, and shared with one another. They did not always agree, and their styles of writing were quite different, but they thought highly of one another. Virginia wrote extensive diaries over the course of her life and many entries included Keynes. From them we get an idea that Keynes challenged and puzzled her, disgusted and attracted her, and was both disagreeable and kind. Of his mind, she wrote that Keynes was "like quicksilver on a sloping

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<sup>154</sup> Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 121.

<sup>155</sup> Lee, 355.

<sup>156</sup> Lee, 355.



board—a little inhuman, but very kindly, as all inhuman people are,”<sup>157</sup> and thought that even after the fame of his *Economic Consequences*, Keynes “remains unmoved, & is more, instead of less, modest than before.”<sup>158</sup>

She often described him in terms that were almost cruel, but were simultaneously true and almost sweet. For example, she wrote that Keynes “has a queer swollen eel like look, not very pleasant. But his eyes are remarkable, & as I truly said when he gave me some pages of his new book to read, the process of mind there displayed is as far ahead of me as Shakespeare’s. True, I don’t respect it so much.”<sup>159</sup> Their work came from different places and expressed different things, but they discussed it nonetheless. And although both may have been flummoxed by the other, they grew from their discussions. He questioned her writing, challenging her about *Night and Day*: “Why should they explain what bus he took? He asked. And why shouldn’t Mrs Hilbery be sometimes the daughter of Katherine. Oh it’s a dull book, I know, I said; but don’t you see you must put it all in before you can leave out.”<sup>160</sup> He also critiqued her book *Three Guineas* and expressed his admiration for *The Years*. He considered it to be her best book, “surpass[ing] even Chekhov’s *Cherry Orchard* for its poignancy.”<sup>161</sup>

Virginia offered critiques of Keynes as well. Virginia questioned his choices and even doled out her opinion on his job. For example, in 1918, “Woolf forecast that if he remained much longer at the Treasury, he would be lost to humanity.”<sup>162</sup> She also found his *Economic Consequences* to be “a book that influences the world without being in the least a work of art.”<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Anne Olivier Bell, ed., *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume One: 1915-1919*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 24.

<sup>158</sup> Anne Olivier Bell, ed., *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Two: 1920-1924*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 18.

<sup>159</sup> A. O. Bell, *The Diary: Volume Two*, 266.

<sup>160</sup> A. O. Bell, *The Diary: Volume Two*, 121.

<sup>161</sup> Davenport-Hines, 259.

<sup>162</sup> Skidelsky, *Hopes Betrayed*, 348.

<sup>163</sup> A. O. Bell, *The Diary: Volume Two*, 33.

Woolf and Keynes had a relationship built on mutual respect. Keynes could take her critiques knowing the value of the things she said, and he was also honest with her, in true Bloomsbury fashion. He could explain his feelings of insecurity, of love, and of struggle with her. Virginia saw Keynes as a Bloomsbury friend who she trusted and respected. His ideas often frustrated her, but the discussions that emerged challenged them both.

Keynes was closer to Virginia's sister, Vanessa Bell. Vanessa held ideas similar to Virginia, but as Vanessa was more outgoing than Virginia, these ideas are more apparent. Keynes and Vanessa lived together for a time and shared a great love in Duncan Grant. After Keynes and Duncan separated, Vanessa and Duncan began an affair (she was married to Clive, but he was notoriously unfaithful) out of which came a child. Instead of creating a rift between them, this shared love seemed to bring Keynes and Vanessa closer to one another. Vanessa enjoyed discussing sexuality with Keynes and felt an affinity for those with non-normative sexualities. Vanessa explained that Keynes, "manage[d] to create an atmosphere in which all is possible. One can talk of fucking and Sodomy and sucking and bushes all without turning a hair."<sup>164</sup>

This openness in Bloomsbury created closeness between Keynes and Vanessa that manifested in a few ways. In her biography of Vanessa, Frances Spalding argues that "[Keynes] had an inordinately high regard for artists and writers and his affection for both Vanessa and Duncan was mixed with reverence."<sup>165</sup> This affection and reverence led Keynes to help Vanessa financially,<sup>166</sup> dote on her when she visited London,<sup>167</sup> vacation with her and Duncan,<sup>168</sup> and take an interest in the education of her children,<sup>169</sup> to name some examples. Vanessa, Duncan, and

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<sup>164</sup> Regina Marler, ed., *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, (London: Bloomsbury Press, 1993), 163.

<sup>165</sup> Frances Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1983), 161.

<sup>166</sup> Spalding, 160, 183.

<sup>167</sup> Spalding, 176.

<sup>168</sup> Quentin Bell, *Bloomsbury Recalled*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 88.

<sup>169</sup> Q. Bell, 95.

Keynes spent a great quantity of time together and often worked near each other, Maynard reading and writing, Vanessa and Duncan painting.<sup>170</sup>

Vanessa was a painter, and although very intelligent, she did not challenge Keynes philosophically. This meant that Keynes could simultaneously relax his intellect with her, but also that he often “pronounce[d] emphatically on matters about which he knew nothing.”<sup>171</sup> Vanessa must have had great patience as there were seldom arguments.<sup>172</sup> What made the connection so great and the talk so open was the feeling of being on equal footing with everyone. Keynes felt a connection to Vanessa because he could talk to her of anything. For example, after leaving him one afternoon Vanessa wrote to Keynes that she hoped he had a pleasant afternoon “buggering one or more of the young men we left for you.”<sup>173</sup> It was this nonjudgmental openness that made Keynes and Vanessa connected to one another.

### Women’s Issues

His relationship to his mother and friends notwithstanding, Keynes also wrote and agitated on behalf of women’s issues. His activism was not continuous, but he showed up for multiple causes. One example of this was his assistance at a Society for Women’s Suffrage meeting. Keynes “acted as chief steward at Exeter Hall” with Lytton Strachey’s sister Pippa telling him afterward, “I don’t know that would have happened if you had not been there to hold the staircase.”<sup>174</sup> In 1907, Keynes was frustrated when he found that the Customs manual treated condoms as contraband, sneering “presumably in order that the God-sent syphilis may prosper.”

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<sup>170</sup> Hession, 175.

<sup>171</sup> Skidelsky, *Hopes Betrayed*, 332.

<sup>172</sup> However, one row between the two did occur in 1930. While running the London’s Artists Association, Keynes often put kindness above artistic merit which caused Vanessa to find fault. See Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 245-247.

<sup>173</sup> Felix, 116.

<sup>174</sup> Skidelsky, *Hopes Betrayed*, 179.

Following this, he advocated for the accessibility and availability of contraceptives.<sup>175</sup> And in 1921, “we find him writing a letter to the *Cambridge Review* upholding the cause of women.”<sup>176</sup> Each of these examples portray the ways Keynes performed public actions that expressed his feelings about sexuality and women’s issues.

In addition to in-person activism, Keynes also wrote a few essays including arguments for the rights of women. In the most famous one “Am I a Liberal?,” Keynes makes a clear argument for women’s rights. He argues for a woman’s right to use contraceptives, to get a divorce, and to hold economic independence while arguing that “the very crude beginnings represented by the suffrage movement were only symptoms of deeper and more important issues below the surface.”<sup>177</sup> Thus, Keynes recognized that the suffrage movement was only a start to addressing the far-reaching issues faced by women and those with non-normative sexualities. Keynes makes an argument that dealing with these issues of sexuality and womanhood would mean “politics would be dealing once more with matters about which everyone wants to know and which deeply affect everyone’s own life.”<sup>178</sup>

These connections to women’s rights lasted throughout his career. Beginning when he joined the Apostles, continuing with his relationship to the Bloomsbury group, and connecting to his views on the economy and the superiority of the elite, Keynes continued to advocate for the rights of the “sexually deviant” well into his later years.

### **Keynes and Interest in the Stories of Others**

Much of Keynes’s relationships with others stemmed from his interest in what they had to say and what they had experienced. While it is true that Keynes liked to argue his point and

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<sup>175</sup> Davenport-Hines, 242.

<sup>176</sup> Harrod, 304.

<sup>177</sup> J.M. Keynes, *The Essential Keynes*, 62.

<sup>178</sup> J.M. Keynes, *The Essential Keynes*, 63.

would use almost any tactic to win an argument, when it came those he was intimate with, he wanted to hear about their experiences.

Part of the reason Keynes enjoyed picking up men and fleeting affairs was because he enjoyed connecting with them and hearing their stories. He sympathized with their struggles, sexual and otherwise, and listened to their woes. For example, in a letter to Grant Keynes portrays these feelings about St. George Nelson. Keynes wrote to Grant of Nelson's woes, including illness, an STI, and financial issues. Davenport-Hines suggest that Keynes's letter, "shows his humanity, his openness and his sympathies—qualities that he would never have developed so well without the sexual expertise that he had developed [in his sexual exploits]." <sup>179</sup> Keynes was interested in casual sex, but he also liked to hear his lovers' stories and help when he could.

Listening to the experiences and woes of his lovers meant that he often found jobs or money for those partners who needed it. For example, Keynes helped Francis Birrell obtain a job as a theater critic for the *Nation* <sup>180</sup> and often helped lovers out in similar ways. In one instance, he helped a student from India, Rimala Sarkar, gain admittance to King's College and found him financial assistance when he needed it. <sup>181</sup> They were most likely having an intimate relationship, which could have jeopardized Keynes's career. Additionally, on multiple occasions, Keynes also helped lovers avoid military service by filing "conscientious objector" forms. These examples point to the ways Keynes enjoyment of his lovers was not just sexual, but had an emotional impact on him as well.

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<sup>179</sup> Davenport-Hines, 223.

<sup>180</sup> Davenport-Hines, 227.

<sup>181</sup> Hession, 79-80.

Connecting with strangers and young men in the street required Keynes to act discreetly. He picked up men from different classes and races and seemingly saw some of them casually or only once. But from these affairs, Keynes took away connections to those outside of his world. Felix argues that this means Keynes could “sympathize, if not quite empathize, with the working classes,”<sup>182</sup> and could have made him “receptive to heterodox forms of thought and action in general and in economics.”<sup>183</sup> Keynes sympathized with the issues and stories of his lovers. He understood they came from different backgrounds than he did and was aware of their experiences, sexual and otherwise.

He was not just interested in the stories of those he was sexually intimate with. In 1919 while working in Paris as a British delegate sent to hash out post-war Europe, Keynes met Dr. Carl Melchior.<sup>184</sup> He was taken by Melchior’s “eyes gleaming straight at us, with extraordinary sorrow in them.”<sup>185</sup> Keynes empathized with Melchior, and in doing so, sympathized with the German situation of post-war financial strife and widespread poverty. Skidelsky argues that although fraternization between Britain and Germany was “forbidden,” the two delegates “had made an unstated contact. The suffering in Melchior’s face made a more vivid impact on Keynes than did the collective sufferings of France.”<sup>186</sup> They mutually understood one another. Davenport-Hines suggests that over the negotiations, the “two men accepted their shared humanity and met in generous hope.”<sup>187</sup> Keynes’s ability to connect to the stories and humanity of others influenced his own viewpoints.

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<sup>182</sup> Felix, xvi.

<sup>183</sup> Felix, 30.

<sup>184</sup> Skidelsky, *Economist as Savior*, 358.

<sup>185</sup> J.M. Keynes, *The Essential Keynes*, 480.

<sup>186</sup> Skidelsky, *Economist as Savior*, 359.

<sup>187</sup> Davenport-Hines, 100.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter I have attempted to portray a brief summary of Keynes's life followed by an expanded, in-depth look at three facets of his life: sexuality, relationships to women and women's issues, and his connection to the stories of others. His life was not long; he died at age 63 and was outlived by his mother. The work he left behind, including not just economic theory but essays, philosophy, letters, and notes, gives us a glimpse into the importance of viewing individuals through the many facets and multiplicity of their personhood.

In viewing Keynes as I have throughout this chapter, we can see the importance of his identities, relationships, and life experiences in influencing the man he was. By focusing on his sexuality, relationships with prominent female artists and feminists, and his interest in the stories of others, I have attempted to center his life experiences in order to offer a glimpse of the ways Keynes held interconnected identities. In the following chapter I discuss my intentionality behind framing Keynes's life the way that I did. I also argue that viewing his life in this way gives us a more nuanced and complete understanding of his life.

## **Chapter 3:**

### **Keynes as Feminist**

Imagine for a moment that Keynes had been “outed” as a gay man during the two years he worked at the India Office. Picture a scenario where the letter he sent to a lover was returned to the India Office, but was not first opened by Keynes. Perhaps a clerk opened it and spread the news upward to Keynes’s bosses and those higher in the government. What would have happened to him? In the decade since Oscar Wilde was sentenced to years of hard labor for being admittedly homosexual, popular opinion on “deviant sexuality” had not changed much, nor had the law.<sup>188</sup> Wilde’s trial had seemingly solidified the deviance of non-normative sexualities. Because of the stigma surrounding homosexuality, Keynes could have been in legal trouble. He could have been charged for “gross indecency” and been sentenced to prison.

But even if Keynes had been discovered and was lucky enough to avoid legal punishment, the stigma surrounding his actions would have followed him for the rest of his life. Most likely, Keynes would have been removed from his India Office post, and King’s College would not have given him a lectureship. Without these opportunities, Keynes would not have been involved in the Treasury Department, and he would not have had the same publishing opportunities. The Keynesian Revolution would not have taken place, and the rise of democratic capitalism may have never occurred.

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<sup>188</sup> See, for example, “Regulating Sex and Sexuality” at [parliament.uk](http://parliament.uk), where it is noted that homosexuality was not decriminalized in England until 1967, Scotland in 1980, and Ireland in 1982, and this was for “private homosexual acts between men aged over 21.” The age was lowered to 18 in 1994, and 16 in 2001.



Keynes knew this. He understood that a false move could be disastrous for his career and for his personal life. Because of this, he amended his actions. He was more discreet with his affairs and kept his sexuality secret from everyone but his close friends. But he was not exactly the most cautious all the time. The returned letter, his landlord finding out and almost blackmailing him, conversations with his family that almost outed him, and affairs with students at King's made him susceptible to discovery.

If Keynes understood the danger of his sexuality being discovered, why did he pick up strange young men and bring them to his home where the eyes of a prying landlord may have discovered his secret? Why did he send explicit letters from his work address? Why did he talk openly about sex with his Bloomsbury friends? Keynes did these things because he was unapologetic about his sexuality and the way he lived his private life.<sup>189</sup> In 1906, he expressed to his first love interest that "ones' private life is so damned private that there is too great a gulf between it and the public appearance."<sup>190</sup> He believed in the value of aesthetic enjoyment, pleasure, and beauty, all of which he derived from his relations with others. Accordingly, his time working for the British government, King's College, and as an economist was coupled with his experiences of living in the shadows. His private life was inextricably intertwined with his public life.

In this chapter, I examine the connections between the public and private in Keynes's life. I discuss the importance of writing biography as I did in chapter two, and I argue that meaning is made in life through the trivial and peripheral experiences. I discuss the ways that viewing a life in this way is feminist and that bringing a feminist lens to biography makes it no

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<sup>189</sup> Davenport-Hines, 195.

<sup>190</sup> Davenport-Hines, 195.

less biased than other forms of biography. Lastly, I argue that using these arguments we can read Keynes as feminist and doing so enhances our understanding of his life and his work.

### **Writing a Life**

In the preceding chapter, I outlined Keynes's life and gave a more complete look at his sexuality, his relationships with women, and his connection to strangers through his interest in their experiences. These methods were intentional. I laid out the life of Keynes in this way to highlight a few important points.

First, by presenting an overview of Keynes's life followed by in-depth explanations of specific identities, I claim my subjectivity as a biographer. A full biography presumes objectivity. By presenting a complete outline of a life, biographers can argue that they are simply representing the facts of Keynes's life. This portrayal of objectivity is flawed. Interpreting a life does not depend only on the presentation of facts, but on the way they are portrayed. Thus, in many of the full biographies of Keynes, the biographers seek to erase their subjectivity by ostensibly presenting a 'complete' account of Keynes's life. Feminist scholarship can, as Hawkesworth points out, help to upend "the contentious assumptions most deeply entrenched in our conceptual apparatus by fostering sustained critique of problematic assumptions that impair an objective grasp of the complex issues."<sup>191</sup> In using feminist scholarship, I am able to question and critique the assumptions that create the invisible subjectivity of past scholarship.

One example of this appears in Davenport-Hines's biography, *Universal Man*. He argues that Keynes compartmentalized his life in accordance with popular Victorian culture of the time. He uses this argument as the basis for the organization of his biography and to argue that "if people were to enjoy clear, civilized, productive lives, without blurs, smudges, mess, waste, and

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<sup>191</sup> Hawkesworth, 206.

overlap, it was essential for them not to mix their friends, aims, urges and trepidation in an undifferentiated hotchpotch.”<sup>192</sup> Putting aside the ways this hypothesis allows Davenport-Hines’s hypothesis to coincide with how he wants to structure the biography and also how he personally views Keynes, it is also not true. Keynes used his position in the government to support his friends who claimed exemption from the First World War,<sup>193</sup> he was intimate with students while he lectured at King’s,<sup>194</sup> and he got the Treasury Department to fund the purchase of some Impressionist paintings for the National Art Gallery based on the suggestions of Bloomsbury friends,<sup>195</sup> to name a few examples. Keynes’s life was nothing if not blurred and smudged.

My reading presents Keynes’s life as interconnected. All the areas of his life meshed with, and were influenced by, each other. Consequently, when I present Keynes’s connection to women, I do so to point out the ways in which Keynes was not separated from the activism, social work, and views of individuals in his life. Whether he agreed with them or not, he was aware and affected by all of these. Contrary to Davenport-Hines’s suggestion that in order to live productively, Keynes had to be free from blurs and smudges, I argue that by centering his sexuality, relationships to women, and interest in lived experiences of Keynes’s life we can see how “smudgy” his life was.

Second, I focus on specific facets of Keynes’s life because I want to point out the ways we can or cannot know a person. Who was Keynes? Was he an economist? An art-lover? A friend, a member of the Bloomsbury Group, an academic, a government official, a lover, an orator, a persuader? The answer is both yes and no; the “true” Keynes was all of these and none

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<sup>192</sup> Davenport-Hines, 8.

<sup>193</sup> N.H. Dimsdale, “Keynes and the Finance of the First World War,” in *Essays on John Maynard Keynes* ed. by Milo Keynes, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 149.

<sup>194</sup> Hession, 79-80.

<sup>195</sup> Davenport-Hines, 266.

of them. His interconnected identities and experiences meant that he experienced each event and interaction differently. In her essay “Street Haunting,” Virginia Woolf asks, “is the true self neither this nor that, neither here nor there, but something so varied and wandering that it is only when we give the rein to its wishes and let it take its way unimpeded that we are indeed ourselves?”<sup>196</sup> It is important that we know about Keynes’s sexuality, for example, because the secrecy he was forced to maintain affected the way he experienced openness and closeness in his relationships with others.

Additionally, as an acolyte of G.E. Moore, Keynes would have understood Woolf’s sentiment perfectly. Keynes believed in Moore’s idea that things like relationships and aesthetic enjoyment hold intrinsic value, and one’s actions are “means to good states of mind.”<sup>197</sup> This also means that, “each man’s good cannot be the sole good,”<sup>198</sup> as “goodness” is subjective and individual. Keynes relied on interactions with others and his enjoyment of the relationships and individuals to create beauty in his life. It is through acknowledging these relationships that we can get closer to understanding the “true” Keynes.

Furthermore, in pointing to these facets of Keynes’s life, I want to move discussion away from who Keynes was a solitary individual and look at him in relation to others. In “Street Haunting,” Woolf suggests that solitariness creates “a shell-like covering which our souls have excreted to house themselves, to make for themselves a shape distinct from others,” and interacting with others breaks this shell.<sup>199</sup> It is in the breaking of the shell we have created for ourselves that we gain new understandings. In “Woolf’s Darkness: Embracing the Inexplicable,”

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<sup>196</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*, (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1970), 28-29.

<sup>197</sup> Skidelsky, *Hopes Betrayed*, 139.

<sup>198</sup> Skidelsky, *Hopes Betrayed*, 139.

<sup>199</sup> Woolf, *The Death of the Moth*, 21-22.

Rebecca Solnit discusses Woolf's essay "Street Haunting," and argues that "thinking works by indirection, sauntering in a roundabout way to places it cannot reach directly...public space, urban space...is here the space in which to disappear from the bonds and binds of individual identity."<sup>200</sup> It is the interactions, the relationships between individuals that expansion of ideas and beliefs takes place. If we think of Keynes as a distinct individual, with his own discrete thoughts and work, we miss the importance of connection. Without the relationships he had with lovers, friends, family, and colleagues, his body of thought would have been different.

Lastly, although Keynes's economic writings made him famous and made a lasting impact, they were not the only or even most important thing about him. Keynes's relationships and identities were just as important as his economic theory. Viewing Keynes relationally allows us to see the interconnectedness of his life. These relationships and life experiences matter because they impacted the way he thought and the actions he took. The necessity of secrecy in Keynes's sexual relations with men meant that he often picked up strangers with different life experiences than himself. Because of that, he developed an understanding of and a sympathy toward these different lifestyles and experiences. Although he valued leadership by the elite, Keynes was open-minded toward all types of people. He was "skeptical of closed minds in all persons, whatever their social status," which led to him taking "a pragmatic, tolerant position when formulating his policy preferences."<sup>201</sup> Thus, if we view Keynes life without engaging with the "smudges," we miss the ways his experiences impacted the types of work he created.

Additionally, individuals have long critiqued Keynes's work because of the life he led. Often, this means that his sexuality was used as reason to ignore or avoid his policies. One of the

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<sup>200</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Men Explain Things to Me*, (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2014), 91.

<sup>201</sup> Charles F. Andrain, *Political Power and Economic Inequality: A Comparative Policy Approach*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 17.

best examples of using homophobia to ground critique is *Keynes at Harvard* by Zygmund Dobbs. Although some of Keynes's work is critiqued for its leftist leanings, entire segments of it are criticized because of his sexuality. Dobbs argues that Keynes's sexuality meant that he would create an economic program that "could be manipulated and controlled by effeminized bureaucracy," since, "history records many attempts by organized homosexuals to control society."<sup>202</sup> While this critique was written in the 1960s, there are examples of individuals who still hold this belief. In 2013, Harvard professor Niall Ferguson spoke at the Tenth Annual Altegris Conference where he argued that "Keynes's economic philosophy was flawed and he didn't care about future generations because he was gay and didn't have children."<sup>203</sup> Though Ferguson was criticized immediately and apologized the next day, he is not alone in expressing such sentiments.

Because there are many examples of this viewpoint that Keynes "deviancy" makes his policies worthless, it is fundamental that we understand his life experiences. Building an understanding of the connections he made to individuals from different segments of life, his relationships to women, and the way these interactions influenced his beliefs makes it easier to see the fullness and richness of what he created. Interconnected identities and experiences made Keynes a better economist.

### **Why Reread a Life?**

How does rereading Keynes through a feminist lens differ from other biographical projects that exist? Countless pages have been written on the life of Keynes, and while each

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<sup>202</sup> Zygmund Dobbs, *Keynes at Harvard: Economic Deception as a Political Credo*, (New York: Probe Research, Inc. Publishers, 1965.

<sup>203</sup> Kathleen Geier, "There's Wrong, There's Very Wrong and Then There's Niall Ferguson," *Washington Monthly*, May 4, 2013, <http://washingtonmonthly.com/2013/05/04/theres-wrong-theres-very-wrong-and-then-theres-niall-ferguson/#>.

provides a rich description of his life, virtually none offer a feminist perspective. Because of this, they make missteps that have often gone unnoticed. For example, while Harrod has been critiqued for avoiding Keynes's sexuality, no other biographers or reviewers criticize the misogyny present in Harrod's biography.<sup>204</sup> In one instance, Harrod makes a jarring argument that talk among members of Bloomsbury could be more open with Vanessa and Virginia because the men saw these women as "different" in that there was "no danger of hearing those rising, strident tones of emotion which must destroy good talk."<sup>205</sup> The implication, of course, is that women in general must be considered too "emotional" for serious conversation. This is just one of *many* examples of Harrod's problematic views that include sexism, racism, and imperialism. In another, he argues that British imperialism is simply an "American mythology" as the British picked up an empire "more or less by accident."<sup>206</sup> Of course, *The Life* was published shortly after Keynes's death, and this problematic language and belief systems were everywhere. However, I have yet to see any other, more recent biographer develop a critique of this aspect of Harrod's work. In fact, Skidelsky seems to follow Harrod's lead in some instances, claiming, for example, "Keynes was the most intuitive of economists—using 'intuitive' as people talk, or use to talk, of 'feminine' intuition—a feeling of certainty apart from rationality."<sup>207</sup> If the sexism of Harrod's *The Life* has gone uncriticized, it makes me wonder if any other biographer has noticed it. Perhaps they have, but did not think it mattered enough to comment.

Harrod makes large missteps, but he is hardly the only biographer who makes questionable arguments. For example, in *Keynes: A Life*, Felix makes a Freudian connection

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<sup>204</sup> Many biographers and reviewers mention Harrod's erasure of Keynes's bisexuality and relationships with men, but I have not found any scholarship that critiques Harrod's misogyny. For critiques of Harrod's treatment of Keynes's sexuality, see, for example, Davenport-Hines, Felix, Skidelsky, and Quentin Bell.

<sup>205</sup> Harrod, 175.

<sup>206</sup> Harrod, 539.

<sup>207</sup> Skidelsky, *Keynes*, 9-10.

between Keynes being reprimanded for masturbation as a child, his rather late circumcision, and shame, arguing that they “point the way toward Maynard’s unabashed homosexuality.”<sup>208</sup> This argument is bewildering considering that this biography was published in 1999. Fortunately, this type of “vulgar Freudianism”<sup>209</sup> no longer holds much weight as it did when Felix was writing about Keynes.

There are countless other examples of authorial bias in Keynes biographies. Skidelsky makes an unconvincing argument that Keynes’s anti-Semitism was simply consonant with his times and because he was friends with a few Jewish individuals, it was “little more than a theological fancy” with “no evidence it influenced his personal conduct.”<sup>210</sup> Considering that Skidelsky notes that Keynes did believe Jews were prone to usury, his dismissal of any prejudice on the part of Keynes seems like a stretch.

Frankly, none of Keynes’s biographers are successful in discussing the nuance of his sexuality or his relationships to women. Of the eight or more biographies I rely on for this project, only Hession uses the concept of bisexuality in reference to Keynes. In the other works, Keynes’s sexuality is discussed as a transition from homosexuality to heterosexuality, as if in finding the right woman Keynes was “turned straight.” This is problematic for many reasons, and by suggesting that Keynes just had to meet the right woman to give up his love for men, these writings imply that his earlier sexuality was simply a phase in his life. It also creates a subtext that Keynes was “cured” of gayness. This is a reductive way to view sexuality. Queer feminist theorists,<sup>211</sup> such as Eve Sedgwick, argue for the importance of viewing sexuality or “queerness”

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<sup>208</sup> Felix, 29.

<sup>209</sup> Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi, eds, “Vulgar Freudianism,” *Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary & Cultural Criticism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 318.

<sup>210</sup> Skidelsky, *Economist as Savior*, 239.

<sup>211</sup> Although my thesis does not have the space to use queer feminist theory as a lens through which to reread Keynes, doing so would add greatly to existing scholarship.



as, “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t* be made) to signify monolithically.”<sup>212</sup> This emphasis on the fluidity, the gaps and overlaps, of sexuality, is fundamental to understanding Keynes’s sexuality throughout his life. The erasure made by these biographers is especially problematic considering that the concept of bisexuality existed when the vast majority of them were writing about Keynes.

Similarly, Keynes’s connection to women and women’s issues is not widely discussed in these biographies. As I mentioned above, Harrod is openly misogynist, but others make questionable statements and omissions as well. For example, England passed an act in 1918 allowing women membership in the lower seats of Parliament, and they were given the same voting rights as men in 1928.<sup>213</sup> Having limited access to Keynes’s writing myself, I expected to find some mention of Keynes’s thoughts or writings about either of these large steps for women, especially considering his friends were suffragettes and his mother was politically active around issues of women’s equality. As a leading intellectual in the early 1900s, who was regularly in contact with the feminists of the time and believed in the importance of women’s economic independence, it is bizarre that no writer has uncovered any letters or conversations including Keynes’s feelings on this. Considering how Florence Keynes is the only biographer to even discuss these milestones toward gender equality, questions of women’s rights seem to be something that no other biographer thought worth mentioning. While it is possible that no documentation exists of Keynes’s thoughts on women’s entrance to Parliament and ability to vote, it is likely that no one has thought to look, especially considering all of Keynes’s previous

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<sup>212</sup> Eve Sedgwick, “Queer and Now,” in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 8.

<sup>213</sup> “Living Heritage: Women and the Vote,” accessed May 1, 2017, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/overview/thevote/>

biographers are male. While the sort of archival research that might shed light on this conundrum is beyond the scope of my project, the silences surrounding these issues are tantalizing.

Therefore, a feminist rereading of Keynes provides us with a deeper look at the nuance of Keynes's life. It forces us to ask questions, such as: How did Keynes feel about his mother's political career? What were Keynes's thoughts on the "woman question?" What was it like for Keynes to be a public figure when his personal relationships were non-normative and could have led to jail time? Did his personal experiences give him a more nuanced understanding of individuals and economics? Without these questions, we are left with a fragmented understanding of his life and his work.

### **Viewing Things Differently**

The intervention I make into the rereading of Keynes's life is significant because I use feminist theories to make connections and find importance where others fall short. As stated in chapter one, I use multiple feminist theories in conversation with one another to better understand Keynes. In this section, I argue for the importance of using feminist theory to reread Keynes's life using examples from my biography.

In *Three Guineas*, Virginia Woolf argues that, "though we see the same world, we see it through different eyes."<sup>214</sup> We interpret situations and information differently because of the things we have experienced. This idea applies not only to the way Keynes experienced the world, but also the way I view his experiences and interactions. There are many ways to write a biographical account of Keynes. Harrod, as an economist, views Keynes in relation to economics and the economic theory he created. Felix views Keynes's life psychoanalytically. The others provide analyses that vary depending on their background. My analysis differs because I view

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<sup>214</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*, (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1966), 18.

Keynes's life using feminist theory. I do this in a few significant ways. First, as mentioned above, I claim my subjectivity. Unlike past biographers, when I make politically charged commentary I do not imply that it is unbiased by my worldview. Second, I view Keynes relationally. Fundamental to all of feminist theory is the idea that individuals are in constant connection with others. Therefore, I view Keynes as a relational figure in constant collaboration with others. Third, I center his peripheral identities. Keynes was an economist and statesman, but he was much more. By centering his marginal identities and experiences, I provide a glimpse of Keynes as primarily a son, friend, and lover who also created theory. Lastly, by bringing his marginal identities to the center, I portray the ways the personal was political in Keynes's life. He could not have been the person, statesman, or economist he was without his lived experiences. This section portrays examples and discussion of the ways using feminist theory helps me to ask different questions, see different connections, and focus on different aspects of Keynes's life.

As mentioned above, I view Keynes's sexuality differently than past biographers. As a bisexual man during a time when English society viewed gayness as "indecent" and punishable by law, Keynes had to hide his sexuality from all but his nearest friends. For a public figure who was used to sharing his opinions, hiding a large part of his life was oppressive. He could not tell his family or his colleagues about his private life, his relationships with men were secret, and even his vacations with Duncan were taken in remote locations to avoid arousing suspicion.<sup>215</sup> It seems possible that Keynes kept a list of his lovers as a sort of diary. As he could not discuss his lovers with anyone for fear of discovery, keeping a list was a form of validation and a way to assert the truth, if even just to himself. Later in his life, he endowed King's with some of his

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<sup>215</sup> Hession, 82.

work and included the list, knowing that it would tell the truth of his experiences. Forced to mask this truth, Keynes turned to the written word to document his reality and avoid the erasure of a crucial point of his life.

Additionally, most work presents Keynes's sexuality as a transition; he was gay and then he became straight. But as Sedgwick mentions above, sexuality is not linear, binary, or monolithic, and Keynes did not experience it that way. Although the first 10-15 years of his sexual life were filled solely with romantic relationships with men, he often flirted with women. In 1906, Keynes wrote to Lytton that he had fallen in love with a woman, Ray Berenson, in Italy, but "as she isn't male I haven't had to think of any suitable steps to take."<sup>216</sup> There are other examples of Keynes's flirtatiousness with women before he met Lydia, and all show sexual interest in both men and women. Furthermore, after he married Lydia, Keynes's attraction to men did not simply cease to exist. He did not "become" heterosexual, as many biographers imply. Felix portrays examples of Keynes after his marriage to Lydia giving "great smacking kisses" to undergraduates at King's and inviting friends to his rooms where he would sometimes wander in while they were bathing.<sup>217</sup> While these examples are trivial, they do portray Keynes's sexuality as fluid. Keynes's attraction to others was based in bisexuality regardless of the gender of his current lovers, and to say otherwise is to erase his lifelong bisexual identity.

Furthermore, his marriage to Lydia was also a non-normative relationship. She had been married previously, and she married Keynes almost the day her divorce was finalized. Although divorce was becoming more common, this action was still a bit scandalous. In his article about queer subculture in Bloomsbury, Christopher Reed argues that "gender play also animated the

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<sup>216</sup> Felix, 60.

<sup>217</sup> Felix, 201.

relationship between Keynes and Lopokova.”<sup>218</sup> Reed points out examples of this, including Lydia cross-dressing, instances of them signing letters to each other using fluid gendered phrases, and their finding fulfillment in forms of sexual intimacy that required no specific gender.<sup>219</sup> They were also open about their bodies with one another. Keynes spoke with Lydia openly about her menstrual cycle,<sup>220</sup> and they sent letters back and forth describing sexual acts.<sup>221</sup> Lydia was not shy about sharing her thoughts on sex, her body, and queerness. Reed gives an example of Lydia shocking those at a White House dinner in 1943 with open talk of gay and lesbian sex.<sup>222</sup> His relationships throughout his life were certainly queer, and his marriage to Lydia was no different. By queer, I mean to express the way that, as Sara Ahmed explains, “bodies leak into worlds... a way of orientating the body towards and away from others, which affects how one can enter different kinds of social spaces.”<sup>223</sup> It is this fluidity, this adherence to non-normative ways of being in relationships that made Keynes queer. These examples show that in ending the discussion of Keynes’s sexuality by claiming he simply “transitioned” to heterosexuality and then retreated into normativity, past biographies have erased his queer experience.

Second, using feminist theory provides new insights into Keynes’s relationship to Florence. In the previous chapter, I examined Florence’s social activism and political roles. I did so to portray the ways Florence was active in her community for women’s rights, healthcare issues, and aiding those in poverty. Her political consciousness was a fundamental part of her

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<sup>218</sup> Christopher Reed, “Bloomsbury as Queer Subculture,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Bloomsbury Group*, ed. Victoria Rosner, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 80.

<sup>219</sup> Reed, 80.

<sup>220</sup> Felix, 207.

<sup>221</sup> Felix, 203.

<sup>222</sup> Reed, 80.

<sup>223</sup> Sara Ahmed, “Queer Feelings,” in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 423.

personality. Although most biographies of Keynes do not discuss Florence's career and viewpoints (and some do so almost flippantly),<sup>224</sup> a few note her desire for something more. Skidelsky notes that although, "Florence was a conscientious wife and mother...she needed larger causes to engage her full sympathies."<sup>225</sup> Florence did not want to be a "typical" Victorian woman who sat at home or spent her time calling on friends. She wanted to create a better society.

Florence was a feminist. She may not have used the language of feminism or even thought much about identifying as one, but her work, beliefs, and activism spoke volumes. She believed in gender equality and in lifting the voices of the marginalized, but it was the activism that cemented her feminism. She did not just believe in these issues; she agitated around them. Florence "campaign[ed] for the establishment of juvenile courts and for the appointment of women police; and urged women to serve as jurors."<sup>226</sup> She devoted much of her life to activism after her children were in school. This devotion shows in *Gathering Up the Threads*, when she argues for the importance of the contribution of women, stating, in one example, "The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act had given women more freedom—freedom which could no longer be refused after the fine contribution made by them during the war."<sup>227</sup> This was not just busy work for her. Florence truly believed in and activated around social justice.

Florence's life and work matter, not only because she was a staunch feminist who deserves her own biography, but also because Keynes remained in regular contact with her throughout his entire life. They were in frequent correspondence from the time he left for Eton

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<sup>224</sup> Instances of this are frequent. For example, Skidelsky's speaks of Florence's early interests in *Hopes Betrayed* in an incredibly paternalistic tone. He seems to imply that while it was sweet that she was involved in the community, she really only did it to get out of the house.

<sup>225</sup> Skidelsky, *Hopes Betrayed*, 58.

<sup>226</sup> Davenport-Hines, 32.

<sup>227</sup> Florence Keynes, 93.

until the day he died.<sup>228</sup> In *Gathering Up the Threads*, Florence does not give us an indication of what they discussed in their written correspondence, and not many examples exist in biographies on Keynes either. However, those that are included show that Keynes wrote to his mother as if she was a friend. He included his thoughts on his friends, his health,<sup>229</sup> his daily schedule,<sup>230</sup> the disappearance of the social order and the abolition of the rich,<sup>231</sup> and his increasing celebrity.<sup>232</sup> He wrote to Florence of everything from daily minutiae to his economic arguments.

Considering how often they corresponded and the breadth of what he relayed to her, it is frustrating that we do not know more of what Florence relayed to Keynes of her work. Because it was not possible to delve into Keynes's archives in England while researching this thesis, I do not know if those letters are documented.<sup>233</sup> However, I have found no records of the way Keynes responded to Florence's political and activist career. Was he proud when she was elected as a female magistrate? Did he attend her swearing in to the mayoral office of Cambridge? Did he care? Was he supportive? These questions are integral to understanding what Keynes thought about the "woman question." They are also necessary to understand how Keynes's relationships influenced his beliefs.

I do not have answers to these questions. But in raising them, I hope to make a few points. In avoiding these questions, previous biographers have passed over an important connection between Keynes's feelings on personal matters and public matters. Additionally, in avoiding these questions, scholars have shown themselves to be less than objective. For example,

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<sup>228</sup> Skidelsky, 268.

<sup>229</sup> Skidelsky, 199.

<sup>230</sup> Skidelsky, 181.

<sup>231</sup> Harrod, 223-224.

<sup>232</sup> Harrod, 287.

<sup>233</sup> I have been unable to find access to Keynes's archives online. However, on one website "Janus," I found some information about the contents of Keynes archives at King's which include eight boxes of letters written between 1907 and 1946. See <https://janus.lib.cam.ac.uk/db/node.xsp?id=EAD/GBR/0272/PP/JMK>, for more information on the contents of Keynes's archival records.

for Davenport-Hines, knowing about Keynes's art collection is given more focus than Florence,<sup>234</sup> which portrays art as more important to understanding Keynes than knowing how he felt about his mother's feminism and political life. Lastly, asking these questions brings feminism in conversation with Keynes's life by challenging the definition of significance when documenting a life.

Third, rereading Keynes's relationship to the women of Bloomsbury using a feminist lens creates new meaning. These relationships were significant to him for many reasons, and it is important to discuss the ways they shaped his life. Specifically, his relationships with Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell had a large impact on his life.

As discussed in chapter two, his relationship to Virginia Woolf was one of mutual regard. They were not the best of friends, but both gave the other criticism and were open with one another in true Bloomsbury fashion. In her diary, Virginia gives many sketches of Keynes; her biographer, Hermione Lee argues that although she wrote sketches in this diary of great men such as Keynes, "these sketches are irreverent, personal, revealing...she questions the idea of 'greatness,' and she looks behind public faces."<sup>235</sup> Woolf pushed the idea of what should be documented. Some of her descriptions of Keynes are biting to the point of being cruel, but she was not to be censored. She often described his physical characteristics poetically but rather abjectly and did not refrain from referring to his personality honestly. For example, after *Three Guineas* was published, she knew Keynes was not going to be pleased with it. In a journal entry from 1938, where she voices anxiety about his critiques, she refers to Keynes as "dear old Hitler" and expresses a note to remain strong through criticism, reminding herself that she is "an

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<sup>234</sup> Davenport-Hines devotes all of chapter 6 to a discussion of Keynes as "Connoisseur," and centers Keynes as a lover of art.

<sup>235</sup> Lee, 8.



independent & perfectly established human being. No one can bully me.”<sup>236</sup> Woolf knew that Keynes was going to challenge her work, as she had done to his many times before, critiquing *Economic Consequences*, and saying of his memoir of Dr. Melchior that it was “long indeed” and that she “was a little bored by the politics, & a good deal impressed by the method of character drawing.”<sup>237</sup> It was this back-and-forth between them that created an intellectual comradery.

Also, Keynes and Woolf continually read each other’s work. They provided each other with copies of their books and articles, and Virginia’s husband, Leonard, published all of Keynes’s books. Like Keynes’s response to *Three Guineas*, they did not always agree with or even like the style and substance of each other’s work. But the exposure to ideas meant that Keynes was aware of Woolf’s opinions and her different way of looking at the world. His relationship to Virginia forced him to look at things differently and deal with criticisms from those outside his profession. She was important to him, and her death created a real feeling of loss. In a letter to Florence, Keynes reports Virginia’s death matter-of-factly, but in the end he hits an emotional note, expressing that he had hoped Leonard had helped Virginia out of depression, sadly stating, “the two of them were our dearest friends.”<sup>238</sup>

While his friendship with Virginia pushed him to view other points of view, his relationship to her sister was significant in other ways. As I portray in chapter two, Keynes and Vanessa discussed everything. They left nothing out of their conversations and spoke openly about sexuality. Keynes and Vanessa spent a lot of time in each other’s company and shared a lover in Duncan Grant.<sup>239</sup> In 1925, Keynes opened an art gallery to exhibit works by Grant and

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<sup>236</sup> Lee, 680.

<sup>237</sup> Bell & McNeillie, *The Diary: Volume Two*, 89.

<sup>238</sup> Skidelsky, *Fighting for Freedom*, 87.

<sup>239</sup> Skidelsky, *The Economist as Savior*, 14.

Vanessa when he saw that they were having trouble getting their works into other galleries,<sup>240</sup> and he even tutored her son Quentin for a few months.<sup>241</sup> In many ways, Keynes fashioned his hobbies and his free time around Vanessa. Theirs was a close friendship in which they brought their entire selves.

My point in this chapter is not to argue that these relationships between Keynes and the women of Bloomsbury have not been well documented. Every biographer of Keynes focuses on the importance of Bloomsbury relationships, including those with Virginia and Vanessa. Instead, I wish to portray the lack of critical analysis of what these relationships meant to Keynes. For example, much has been written about the influence of G.E. Moore on Keynes.<sup>242</sup> From these multiple examinations we can read about the philosophical changes of Keynes over time, the ways he acted on his belief in Moore's philosophy, and his movement away from some of Moore's philosophy as he aged. But there has been virtually no work written on the impact of Virginia Woolf or Vanessa Bell on the work of Keynes. How did grappling with the works of Woolf impact Keynes's own writing? How did her critiques on his work impact the way he wrote? How did Keynes's relationship with Vanessa impact the way he thought about economics? How did his relationships with both Virginia and Vanessa impact Keynes's worldview in general?

One scholar has recently attempted to make some connections and provide some answers along these lines. Jennifer Wicke incorporates modernism to argue that both Keynes and Virginia in their separate works attempt to "re-present what is acknowledged beforehand to be resistant to

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<sup>240</sup> Davenport-Hines, 267.

<sup>241</sup> Quentin Bell, 95.

<sup>242</sup> Examples include: John Bryan Davis's book, *Keynes's Philosophical Development*, 1994.; Bradley Bateman's article "G.E. Moore and J.M. Keynes: A Missing Chapter," 1988.; and the multiple examinations of Moore and Keynes in Skidelsky, Davenport-Hines, Hession, Harrod, and other biographers.

representation, at least by traditional... means.”<sup>243</sup> She argues that Keynes and Virginia came at their respective studies from the same angle and influenced economics and fiction, respectively, in a similar way. However, she directly states that she is not conducting an “influence study” about how the two influenced one another, arguing it would be “trivial” to her larger argument.<sup>244</sup> Thus, even Wicke, who argues that both Keynes and Virginia brought similar ideas to their respective work, fails to see the importance of intersections of influence.

Answering these questions is fundamental to fully understanding Keynes. Failing to do so skews our understanding of what was important to him. Although biographers have spent thousands of pages discussing Keynes’s life and work, it is telling that questions about what Keynes got out of his relationships to women are not discussed in detail. Additionally, I do not subscribe to the argument that such documentation does not exist and therefore was not written about. When biographers spend pages speculating about the “cause” of Keynes’s sexuality, it is disingenuous to argue this omission is for factual reasons.

Lastly, Keynes supported women’s rights. He may not have marched in suffrage parades or wore a “votes for women” sash over his clothes, but his actions and writings speak loudly. As explained in chapter two, Keynes showed up for women’s rights by helping to organize a women’s suffrage meeting, advocating for the use of birth control, and arguing for women’s economic independence. These small but clear actions and statements speak volumes. Keynes did not have to openly consider all women to be equal to all men in everything to be a feminist in his time. Although women had been gaining rights slowly for a few decades, Keynes was still

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<sup>243</sup> Jennifer Wicke, “Mrs. Dalloway’ Goes to Market: Woolf, Keynes, and Modern Markets,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 28 (1994): 11, accessed June 3, 2016, doi: 10.2307/1345911.

<sup>244</sup> Wicke, 12.

living in Victorian England where the popular sentiment toward women was that they belonged in the home taking care of the children and their household.

Therefore, for Keynes to have philosophical discussions with Virginia and Vanessa, to read Virginia's work and give feedback and criticism, to be in regular correspondence with Florence while she was activating for women's rights, to aid in holding a suffrage meeting, and to write openly about contraception and women's economic independence portrays a definite degree of understanding and sympathy for the "woman question." It is this heightened awareness of women's issues and his ability to sympathize at an individual and institutional level that lead me to argue that Keynes should be read as feminist.

### **Keynes as Feminist**

Rereading Keynes using standpoint feminist theory, intersectionality, and transnational feminism from a range of scholars such as Sandra Harding, Barbara Smith, and Chandra Mohanty<sup>245</sup> gives me a lens through which to see his life differently. It also means that I view different parts of his life as equally or more important than his economic theory. In this section, I argue that Keynes should be read as a feminist given all the information presented above. Additionally, I argue that some critiques of Keynes's theory are based in critiques of his life experience, which is a common critique of feminism. Lastly, I point to the ways critiques of Keynes mirror critiques of feminism from that period.

Keynes was familiar with non-normativity and had to hide his bisexuality from all but his close friends. He struggled for many years trying to keep quiet. How does this feeling of hiding one's true self impact the ways we experience the world? For one thing, it creates a sense that

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<sup>245</sup> Among many others, including: standpoint theory from Nancy Hartsock and Donna Haraway, intersectionality from Kimberlé Crenshaw and bell hooks, and transnationalism from Lela Fernandez and Jacqui Alexander.

what one chooses to do with one's body or who one chooses to love makes one qualified or unqualified for certain types of work. Keynes wrote of this specifically when he commented on sexual hypocrisy in a letter to Duncan about a Cambridge professor who was forced to resign due to adulterous behavior. He writes, "can you conceive of a worse reason for resigning one's professorship of mathematics?" Keynes followed a few days later with "a society, in which a man is ruined for such a thing, is one to be ashamed of."<sup>246</sup> Expressing disgust with this termination, Keynes was also making a larger critique on the ways prejudice against certain types of actions gives individuals the right to publically ostracize the non-normative. Living in the shadows creates a feeling of being less worthy.

As standpoint feminist theory points out, marginalized identities can actually open our eyes to viewpoints that the dominant cannot see. For example, Harding argues that "standpoint theory claims that some kinds of social locations and political struggles *advance* the growth of knowledge, contrary to the dominant view that politics and local situatedness can only block scientific inquiry."<sup>247</sup> Thus, Keynes's bisexuality, far from being detrimental to serving in public office, lecturing at King's, and creating economic tracts, essentially gave Keynes a more nuanced view of the world. Standpoint theorist Nancy Hartsock argues that experiences of oppression do not make a person "better" than anyone, and points to the ways experiences of oppression leave lasting impacts. However, because of their positionality, "marginalized groups are less likely to mistake themselves for the universal 'man'...the experience of domination may provide the possibility of important new understandings of social life."<sup>248</sup> Thus, when Keynes was

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<sup>246</sup> Peter Stansky, *On Or About December 1910: Early Bloomsbury and Its Intimate World*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 120.

<sup>247</sup> Sandra Harding, "A Socially Relevant Philosophy of Science? Resources from Standpoint Theory's Controversiality," in *Hypatia: Feminist Science Studies* 19(2004), 26.

<sup>248</sup> Nancy Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint Revisited," in *The Socialist Feminist Project: A Contemporary Reader in Theory and Politics*, ed. Nancy Holmstrom, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002), 354.

interacting with others, he was able to think more deeply about their point of view. He was able to gain “new understandings of social life” because he was cognizant of being non-normative. An old joke about Keynes’s breadth of mind notes that if one “put five economists in a room, they will in short order produce six opinions, two of them Mr. Keynes’s.”<sup>249</sup> This breadth of thought would not have been possible without the different perspectives he gained from living with a non-normative identity.

Additionally, using intersectionality as a tool, we can see Keynes’s life as a web of interconnected experiences and relationships. Intersectional feminism, as explained by Patricia Hill Collins posits that “race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ability, nation, ethnicity, and similar categories of analysis are best understood in relational terms rather than in isolation from one another.”<sup>250</sup> We can never experience a situation from the vantage point of one identity category. Moreover, similarly to standpoint, intersectionality points to the importance of positionality. Collins explains, “individuals and groups differentially placed within intersecting systems of power have different points of view on their own and others’ experiences...advancing knowledge projects that reflect their social locations.”<sup>251</sup> These ideas of interconnected, relational categories and the importance of social location are key to understanding the life of Keynes.

The appreciation of intersecting identities creating different understandings was not popular in with white, British feminists in the early 1900s. There were schools of thought that one either agreed with or not. Thus, for Keynes to continually update his ideas with new

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<sup>249</sup> Robert Lekachman, “The Radical Keynes,” in *The Policy Consequences of John Maynard Keynes*, ed. Harold L. Wattel, (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1985), 31.

<sup>250</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, “Intersectionality’s Definitional Dilemmas,” in *Annual Review of Sociology* 41(2015), 14, accessed April 19, 2017, doi: 10.1146/annurev-soc-073014-112142

<sup>251</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, 14.

information, and to create economic theory combining capitalist and socialist ideas showcases an openness to different ideas. In a conversation about Keynes, Skidelsky argues that although Keynes's economic arguments have merit economically, "the roots of those positions lie deep in his own personality and lie deep in the value of his friends."<sup>252</sup> Quentin Bell agrees, stating "Maynard was an emotional person and his motives were influenced by personal affections."<sup>253</sup> Additionally, Davenport-Hines makes an argument that Keynes drew on lived experiences for his work, stating that Keynes "drew on his circumstances and surroundings as he resisted slogans, exposed lies, knocked aside people's crutch-words, insisted upon what was actual, [and] built a bridgehead into reality."<sup>254</sup> Thus, Keynes's beliefs and writings stemmed from who he was as a person. But the conversation should not end there. Simply stating that Keynes's "personality" shaped his work does not go deep enough. To fully understand his life and work, we need to look at his intersecting identities and his positionality.

Keynes was a white, middle-class, bisexual man whose health issues rendered him somewhat disabled throughout his life. These identities connected to make Keynes's experiences unique from those of his friends, his lovers, and his colleagues. Escoffier argues that "his homosexuality had made him acutely aware that the statistically normal patterns of human behavior promised far too narrow a view of the possibilities of human happiness."<sup>255</sup> Living outside of the norm meant that Keynes gained perspective on different possibilities and different ways of being. However, this did not make him a "universal" figure, as Davenport-Hines argues. Keynes was not somehow more all-encompassing than others because of his identities. Instead,

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<sup>252</sup> Blaug, 50.

<sup>253</sup> Derek Crabtree & A.P. Thirlwall, *Keynes and the Bloomsbury Group*, (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1980), 77.

<sup>254</sup> Davenport-Hines, 9.

<sup>255</sup> Escoffier, 80.

as Collins points out, his different experiences gave him different viewpoints. The differences allowed him to understand that not all of humanity fits into broad categories. Seeing individuals as just that gave Keynes a different vantage point through which to interact and create theory. Therefore, using standpoint feminist theory and intersectionality helps us to see the ways Keynes was different from economists, men, and larger society and the ways he relied on these differences for his work and his interactions.

But Keynes was feminist in other ways as well. It was not just the ways he lived his life that were feminist, but also the actions he took and the work he created. Viewing Keynes's life through a lens of early socialist feminism depicts a man who was committed to rights for women and queer folks. As discussed above, Keynes wrote about the importance of contraception and economic independence for women, he helped organize for suffrage, and shared frequent communication with feminist figures. Socialist feminism of this time centered on all of these ideas. For example, socialist feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman explained "an entire sex lives in relation of economic dependence upon the other sex, and the economic relation is combined with the sex-relation. The economic status of the human female is relative to the sex-relation."<sup>256</sup> Keynes understood this argument for economic dependence, both socially and economically. He believed women's economic dependence on men related both to their inferior status and to economic questions of supply and demand, and laissez-faire.<sup>257</sup> His argument was that economic independence for women would benefit gender relations, but would also add to the greater good.

Moreover, Keynes's feelings on the importance of access to birth control was also a popular feminist concern of the time. Feminists of the time, including Amy Linnett, pointed out

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<sup>256</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wall-Paper and Other Writings*, (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 235-236.

<sup>257</sup> J.M. Keynes, *The Essential Keynes*, 63.



that “desire for sexual relations was mutual and not confined to men,” which led to an understanding of the way “contraceptives meant that a woman could ‘please herself’ sexually.”<sup>258</sup> Linnett and others understood that access to contraceptives meant that women could hold control over their sexuality. Keynes understood what it was like to have less than total control over the terms of his sexuality. For years he had to hide his attraction to and intimacy with men at the risk of imprisonment. He despised the idea that the control of sexuality was held by those who held antiquated views on such topics.

His feminism did not stop at empty words; Keynes advocated in favor of feminist issues. He was not shy about sharing his feelings on women’s issues in public. His essay “Am I a Liberal?” in which he argues for women’s rights, was first given as a lecture and was then published as an article in the *Nation*. As mentioned above, in “Am I a Liberal?” Keynes challenges notions outdated notions of birth control and argues for the importance of divorce and economic independence for women. Keynes also advocated for the advancement of individual women. For example, soon after being elected as a Fellow of the British Academy, Keynes “prompted the election of Beatrice Webb as the first woman FBA in 1931.”<sup>259</sup> Before his death, he performed a similar task, working for “the election of Joan Robinson as a second female FBA,” although he was not successful.<sup>260</sup>

These were not unrelated actions performed randomly throughout his life. Each work, action, and attempt to help a friend was part of a larger belief in women’s rights. Harrod argues that these words and actions were “not a leaning towards feminist and ‘women’s rights’ in the narrower sense,”<sup>261</sup> and Skidelsky broadly states, “Keynes’s notion of inequity was largely

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<sup>258</sup> Rowbotham, *Dreamers*, 85.

<sup>259</sup> Davenport-Hines, 274.

<sup>260</sup> Davenport-Hines, 274.

<sup>261</sup> Harrod, 125.

limited to the existence of windfall or unjustified gains and losses. Justice to Keynes involved the maintenance of existing group norms and the fulfilment of settled expectations.”<sup>262</sup> These arguments are misjudgments. Skidelsky casts a wide net with the words “equity” and “justice” but seems only to mean Keynes’s notion of who should hold wealth and positions of power. Yes, Keynes felt the elite should rule. But to ignore his work toward gender equity and justice makes the argument that gender issues did not matter and were not in the realm of “equity” and “justice.” Clearly, they did and were. He would not have worked throughout his life to aid women if these issues were inane to him.

Rereading Keynes as a feminist does not only mean we see him as a champion of equality for all women, or as a type of “hero.” Like all feminists, especially many from the early 1900s, Keynes held flawed ideas.<sup>263</sup> First, he was an elitist. Harrod argues that Keynes life was colored by his past and the “presuppositions of Harvey Road.”<sup>264</sup> Skidelsky explains these “presuppositions” to mean that “Keynes had a very strong inherited sense of duty from his parents...he believed in a disinterested ruling class, and therefore he believed that class could be entrusted with quite a lot of power which wouldn’t be abused.”<sup>265</sup> Felix agrees with this sentiment, claiming that Keynes believed in “rational persuasion by a self-appointed elite.”<sup>266</sup> It is clear that Keynes believed leadership should remain in the hands of the powerful. This did not mean that he agreed completely with social norms, as we can see from his feelings on the stigmas surrounding non-normative sexuality. However, it is critical to realize that although

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<sup>262</sup> Skidelsky, *The Economist as Savior*, 223.

<sup>263</sup> The ideas I discuss here are strictly related to feminist theory in Keynes life. I do not go into the flaws with his economic theory as this project is not a look at Keynes’s work. Rereading Keynes’s work using feminist theory would certainly find faults, and I touch on the further research needed in the next chapter.

<sup>264</sup> Harrod, 192-193.

<sup>265</sup> Blaug, 50-51.

<sup>266</sup> Felix, 3.

Keynes pushed for women's and gay rights, he still held that certain individuals deserved power over others.

It also does not mean that he stood outside the feminism of his time. Much of white, liberal British feminism of the early 1900s was predicated on “helping” the poor, not on abolishing the ruling class.<sup>267</sup> Transnational feminist Linda Carty explains this gendered British nationalism and the ways it perpetuated colonialism, stating “women from the United Kingdom who went to the colonies, either on their own or as wives of colonial administrators, took it as their mission—indeed, their burden—to save the unfortunate women of these colonies.”<sup>268</sup> This burden was not just meant to save the “uncivilized” women from the colonies. These missions also framed British women as deserving of their own rights. Carty explains:

many women imperialists protested the inequality between the sexes while at the same time espousing the extension of Empire as Britain's paternal responsibility... distinguishing themselves from enslaved and, later, from colonized women, soon became part of how some women of the Empire's ruling and middle classes won respect from the men who ruled it and, even more critically, an underpinning of the fight for women's suffrage.<sup>269</sup>

White British women could use this example of their moral superiority over the colonized as a means for gaining their own rights. Keynes's imperialist, elitist viewpoints aligned with the British feminist of his time.

Additionally, Keynes was anti-Semitic. Davenport-Hines brings up Keynes's anti-Semitism but with an apologist tone, stating “Keynes had no hostile theory about the Jews, but enjoyed offering amateur psychology to explain mental traits that he generalized as Jewish.”<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> See Mann, pages 307-315 for an analysis of imperialism, suffrage, and colonialism in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Western feminism.

<sup>268</sup> Linda Carty, “The Discourse of Empire and the Social Construction of Gender,” in *Scratching the Surface: Canadian, Anti-Racist Feminist Thought*, ed. Enakshi Dua and Angela, (Toronto, ON: Women's Press, Robertson, 1999), 37.

<sup>269</sup> Carty, 38-39.

<sup>270</sup> Davenport-Hines, 308.

Unfortunately, this is a rather kind view to take of Keynes considering he thought Jews to be smelly, impure,<sup>271</sup> repulsive,<sup>272</sup> and greedy.<sup>273</sup> As Keynes met more Jewish people, his views softened a bit with time, but he retained his belief in the stereotypes about the Jews. He was not alone in his anti-Semitism even within his friend groups; at one point, Virginia Woolf referred to her soon to be husband, Leonard Woolf, as a “Jew-boy.”<sup>274</sup> Such casual anti-Semitic expressions were common in Keynes’s lifetime, especially in the circles in which he traveled.

It was not just Jewish people he was prejudiced against. Keynes was also a member of the Eugenics Society. This fact has been almost completely neglected by Keynes’s biographers. Hession mentions that Keynes gave a lecture at the Eugenics Society once, Skidelsky includes one mention of eugenics in the index of his second volume but the reference is unfindable, and Davenport-Hines also ignores the issue. Ignoring this part of Keynes’s past is another instance of the subjectivity and bias of biographers, and the way that ignoring certain aspects of his life erases them from conversation. Keynes believed in “an economic argument for population eugenics.”<sup>275</sup> In his argument, he “espoused deploying unnamed tools of the state to ‘manage’ the population of a given country, including with an eye toward maintaining what he saw as a desirable racial stock.”<sup>276</sup> Eugenics often used coded language to promote a racialized ideal, and it appears Keynes may have adhered to this language.

Of course, this does not mean Keynes was a racist outlier. As Magness argues, “Keynes’s frequent eugenic nods are deeply bigoted by modern standards, even as they were common

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<sup>271</sup> Davenport-Hines, 309.

<sup>272</sup> Skidelsky, *Hopes Betrayed*, 92.

<sup>273</sup> Skidelsky, *Hopes Betrayed*, 362.

<sup>274</sup> Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautsmann, eds, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume 1: 1888-1912*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 510.

<sup>275</sup> Phillip Magness, “Keynes Favored Eugenics, Migration Restrictions, and Population Control,” *Foundation for Economic Education*, June 6, 2016, accessed April 19, 2017, <https://fee.org/articles/when-keynes-lectured-mises-on-eugenics-migration-and-population-control/>.

<sup>276</sup> Magness.

among intellectuals in his day.”<sup>277</sup> Feminist intellectuals were also adherents to eugenics ideals. Rowbotham explains “eugenics could be embraced as a positive force by feminists and socialists campaigning for better conditions of motherhood, while birth controllers and advocates of free love could similarly back up their cause with eugenic rhetoric.”<sup>278</sup> As discussed above, the belief in racial superiority was a way for white British women to express their patriotism with an aim of acquiring more rights for themselves within British society. Antoinette Burton argues that “racial superiority, like imperial ideology itself, depended on and nurtured the cult of Britishness that continued to justify British imperial rule on grounds that were expressly national,”<sup>279</sup> and British women bought into this racist patriotism for their own gain. Burton explains, “if feminist argument was preoccupied with race preservation, racial purity, and racial motherhood, this was in part because it had to be. One of the most damaging attacks made against the case for female emancipation was that it would enervate the race.”<sup>280</sup> Thus, much of white British feminism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were founded on racist, colonialist, and imperialist ideas simply in order for these white British women to successfully seek emancipation. Unfortunately, this eugenicist side of Keynes was part and parcel with much of the British feminism of his time.

The elitist, anti-Semitic, and racist faults of Keynes are fundamental to building and understanding a feminist rereading of his life. Keynes’s identities meant that he did experience marginalization. However, his privileged identities meant that he also perpetuated oppressive

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<sup>277</sup> Magness.

<sup>278</sup> Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day*, 88.

<sup>279</sup> Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 38.

<sup>280</sup> Burton, 48.

ideals on marginalized others. This challenge between one's own marginalization and privilege continues in feminism today.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout my research, I have read Keynes as a feminist. His non-normativity, queerness, relationships to politically conscious women, writings, actions, and flaws all present a thoroughly feminist character. While each type of feminism is different and brings different issues to the table, each type focuses on the importance of activating for social change. Although I have read countless times in books and articles that Keynes did not care about women's issues, justice, equality, and the like, I argue that if one reads Keynes's life using standpoint feminist theory, intersectionality, socialist feminism, and/or transnational feminist theory, his feminism becomes clear. Thus, this chapter portrays the importance of rereading Keynes using feminist theory in order to build a more complete understanding of his life, relationships, and beliefs.

In "Street Haunting," Virginia Woolf writes that "it is only when we look at the past and take from it the element of uncertainty that we can enjoy perfect peace."<sup>281</sup> We can never know if Keynes would have considered himself a feminist or an advocate for women's rights. But with the information I have presented in this chapter, I aim to make clear that if one puts together the pieces of Keynes's life looking specifically for these connections, one will find them. It is an imperfect peace, as uncertainty remains. But it is closer to peace than that which has been presented by the biographers who have come before.

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<sup>281</sup> V. Woolf, *The Death of The Moth and Other Essays*, 33.

## **Chapter 4:**

### **Conclusion**

While studying economics as an undergraduate, I enrolled in “Healthcare Economics.” I was interested in the combination of economics and a politically charged topic like healthcare in the United States. Unfortunately, the class was basically an econometric study of healthcare and efficiency; it incorporated virtually no discussion or political commentary. I struggled with studying the economics of healthcare “objectively” when I knew there was nothing objective about ignoring questions of who deserves medical insurance or adequate healthcare. The class made it clear that, at my undergraduate institution, economics was considered separate from politics. However, economics is a science based on human behavior and, as such, is completely dependent on analyzing or hypothesizing the outcomes of human beliefs and actions.

Keynes approached economics with an understanding of its social context. Although he began his career centered in classical economic theory, he became increasingly skeptical about the reliance of economics on mathematics. Skidelsky attributes this to “his growing understanding of the complexity, and reflexive nature, of social life,”<sup>282</sup> and Davenport-Hines suggests “Keynes had the greatness to say that economics is a matter of time and temper.”<sup>283</sup> Keynes himself wrote in the first chapter of *The General Theory* that classical theory can only be applied to special cases which “happen not to be those of the economic society in which we actually live, with the result that its teaching is misleading and disastrous if we attempt to apply

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<sup>282</sup> Skidelsky, *The Economist as Savior*, 412.

<sup>283</sup> Davenport-Hines, 130.

it to the facts of experience.”<sup>284</sup> He understood that economics could not be framed entirely by mathematics and divorced from humanity.<sup>285</sup>

Throughout this project, I have focused on the life of Keynes and the ways his life can be reread using feminist theory to create a more nuanced understanding of who he was. He was able to see the humanity in economics because of his life experiences. While it is true, as Felix argues, that “the private Keynes unmistakably inhabited the public Keynes,”<sup>286</sup> past scholarship has sought to connect only specific parts of Keynes’s private life to his public life. For example, Felix’s connections between Keynes’s private and public life are often based in vulgar usage of Freudian understandings of his homosexuality and his mother/son dynamic. In my thesis, I agree with Felix that the “private Keynes inhabited the public”, but I argue that to see the ways it did so, one must use feminist theory or risk erasing specific experiences. The personal was every bit as political in Keynes’s life as it was to the Second Wave feminists who chanted the slogan.<sup>287</sup> In this chapter, I discuss the significance of this argument and my project. I argue that through rereading Keynes’s life using a feminist lens, we can see new connections, ask different questions, and develop a deeper understanding of who he was. I suggest and introduce ideas for further research, and I argue that viewing Keynes’s life through a feminist lens disrupts the masculine nature of economics and can be used more broadly as a method of viewing other historical figures.

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<sup>284</sup> J.M. Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Company, 1964), 3.

<sup>285</sup> Although I briefly address Keynes’s economic ideas here, I do not intend to complete an analysis or feminist rereading of Keynes’s economic theory. I do believe such an analysis should take place and provides ample room for further research.

<sup>286</sup> Felix, xv.

<sup>287</sup> Carol Hanisch, “The Personal is Political,” *Women of the World, Unite! Writings by Carol Hanisch*, last modified 2009, <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>.



## Outcomes

This thesis, which argues for a feminist rereading of Keynes's life, has been a passion project. It has allowed me to look critically at the man's life and at the ways that life has been documented and analyzed to date. I have grappled with the question of what makes an individual "feminist" and also what makes a biography "feminist." These questions have given me an outlet to explore what makes a life and who gets to decide about how the life story gets told. But this project is more than an exploration into the ways feminism can be found in Keynes's life. As I discuss in chapter one, feminist research is not simply a method of research divorced from politics. Hawkesworth argues that "feminist research acknowledges that particular political convictions inspire its existence."<sup>288</sup> My project is inherently political *because* it is feminist. My rereading of Keynes's life is inspired by the political conviction that his life experiences, sexuality, and relationships matter as much as his professional experiences. I use feminist politics to bring his marginal experiences to the center. In rereading him in this way, we can develop a more nuanced, more complete understanding of his life that could be used in the future to develop a deeper understanding of his theory as well.

Rereading Keynes using a feminist lens is significant for a few reasons. First, I argue that a feminist rereading of the life of Keynes is necessary and relevant because Keynes's work remains relevant. After the Second World War and Keynes's death, his policies were the foundation for much of economics in the Western World.<sup>289</sup> But with the expansion of globalization and the advent of neoliberalism, Keynesianism fell out of popularity. In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey argues that by 1982:

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<sup>288</sup> Hawkesworth, 5.

<sup>289</sup> It is important to note that many historians and economists have argued that Keynes would not have subscribed to modern versions of "Keynesianism." Skidelsky, Blaug, and many others have suggested that similar to other philosophers, Keynes's theories have been used in ways he may not have liked or intended.

Keynesian economics had been purged from the corridors of the IMF and World Bank...[and] most economic departments in the US...had fallen in line by broadly cleaving to the neoliberal agenda that emphasized the control of inflation and sound public finance (rather than full employment and social protections) as primary goals of economic policy.<sup>290</sup>

As neoliberalism has become the paradigmatic form of global economics, Keynes's ideas of democratic capitalism have been pushed out. However, some variations on Keynes's economic ideas are still being argued. For example, Harvey argues that the United States behaves in a Keynesian way even as it operates under neoliberal rules by "resort[ing] to massive deficit-financing of its military and its consumerism."<sup>291</sup>

Keynes's impact on economics is long lasting because he forced people to question, as Blaug puts it, "is economics therefore a subject in which there are no absolute truths but only truths relative to time and place?"<sup>292</sup> Regardless of the debate over the efficacy of Keynes's theories, he raised questions that people are still asking. Leftists still consider Keynesian policies to be too capitalist, and many on the right still view Keynesian policies as variations on socialism.<sup>293</sup> If his theories are still relevant and still create debate, it is crucial that we understand them. But we cannot understand his policies without understanding Keynes. Rereading his life is relevant because his work is still relevant, and if we do not understand who Keynes was and what influenced him, we are doomed to misinterpret his work.

Second, a feminist rereading of the life of a major economist is necessary because it portrays the ways in which the personal is political for all individuals. For some, specifically those with marginalized identities such as women, people of color, those with disabilities, and

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<sup>290</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 93.

<sup>291</sup> Harvey, 150.

<sup>292</sup> Blaug, 2.

<sup>293</sup> See Chapter 4 of Blaug's *John Maynard Keynes*, specifically pages 66-70, in which James Tobin discusses the ways Keynes is disliked by both those on the right and the left.

others, their personal life is always tied to their public life. This can be both negative and positive. For example, when we see people questioning whether a woman is too emotional to be a leader or when we question whether we can trust a rape survivor because she has a “promiscuous past,” we are connecting their personal lives to their public lives. Conversely, this can also allow individuals to use their personal experiences, struggles, and identities politically. Donna Haraway argues that although the subjugated are not in “innocent” positions, their knowledge is “preferred because in principle they are least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretive core of all knowledge.”<sup>294</sup> For the subjugated, the personal has in many instances been made political, such as the powerful using the personal to question an individual’s legitimacy, or as a tool by the subjugated to argue for the importance of their viewpoints.

This connection of one’s positionality to one’s work is generally only accepted by academia when done by marginalized individuals or by those doing scholarship outside of “hard” sciences. But in a society that consistently frames women in terms of their personal lives, it is radical to do the same to famous men. By suggesting Keynes’s life experiences led him to create specific economic theory, I aim to humanize his work. Like Keynes, I see the mathematizing of economics and its dependency on econometrics as problematic. It erases the social, relational aspect of economics and replaces it with statistical and mathematical analysis. Thus, my feminist rereading of Keynes connects his life to his work to argue that every individual brings their past, beliefs, and experiences to the work they create.

Third, viewing Keynes’s personal life in relation to his work is necessary because individuals still challenge his work based on his life choices. As I mention in the previous chapter, homophobia is still a reason given for the dismissal and discussion of Keynes’s work.

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<sup>294</sup> Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” in *Feminist Studies* 14 (1988), 584.

Niall Ferguson is hardly the only individual to dismiss Keynes's views because of his sexuality. Greg Mankiw, Harvard economist and author of many macroeconomic textbooks, wrote in the *New York Times* that "passing a larger national debt to the next generation may look attractive to those without children. (Keynes himself was childless),"<sup>295</sup> implying that Keynes could dismiss long run trends because he was gay and therefore childless. This is a popular sentiment. In an article in the *National Review* in response to the hubbub surrounding Ferguson's comments, Jonah Goldberg posits that "it's hardly as if it's unheard-of in academia to speculate that one's sexual orientation (or race, or gender, etc.) can influence a person's views on public policy."<sup>296</sup> Goldberg is right; individuals with non-normative or marginalized identities are continually considered to have subjective views.<sup>297</sup>

I do not wish to argue against this positioning of non-normative individuals as subjective, but instead wish to point to the ways this seems to be a practice mainly reserved for those with non-dominant identities. My project aims to flip this criticism into an appreciation for the ways Keynes was influenced by his personal life. The fact that he was influenced by his lifestyle, his relationships, and his sexuality made him a better, more *nuanced* economist. Subjectivity gives us the capacity to create work based on personal experience and lived reality. Unfortunately, society construes the knowledge produced by the experiences and realities of the marginalized as "less than" and as outliers from the norm. Haraway posits, "only those occupying the positions of the dominators are self-identical, unmarked, disembodied, unmediated, transcendent...the

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<sup>295</sup> N. Gregory Mankiw, "What Would Keynes Have Done?" *New York Times*, November 28, 2008, accessed April 26, 2017, [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/30/business/economy/30view.html?\\_r=1&](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/30/business/economy/30view.html?_r=1&).

<sup>296</sup> Jonah Goldberg, "Keynes Was Gay—Not that There's Anything Wrong with That," *National Review*, May 4, 2013, accessed March 12, 2017, <http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/347396/keynes-was-gay-not-theres-anything-wrong-jonah-goldberg>.

<sup>297</sup> Other examples include viewing Michel Foucault's work in relation to his sexuality or queerness such as Owen Heathcote's "Opacity and the Closet," or viewing Marcel Proust's work in relation to his mysticism in Eve Sedgwick's book *The Weather in Proust*.

only position from which objectivity could not possibly be practiced and honored is from the standpoint of the master, the Man.”<sup>298</sup> Therefore, it is the dominant group that has no label or sense of their own subjectivity, when, in reality, they are the most subjective.

This means that Ferguson, Mankiw, Goldberg, and others can express comments about Keynes’s sexuality without looking at their own. In the wake of the Ferguson comments, many articles were written about homosexuality, Keynes, and economic theory.<sup>299</sup> But how many were written about heterosexuality and economics? Or Ferguson’s sexuality? Despite conducting extensive online searches, I have found none. Marginalization occurs when we consider the identities of the dominant to be normative. For example, when society considers maleness or heterosexuality to be the norm, no one has to claim these identities. As Haraway argues in the quote above, the positions of the dominators are unmarked which makes the positions of the marginalized inherently opposite and subjective. By never questioning how heterosexual economists bring their experiences of sexuality to their work, the implication is that only deviant sexualities make an individual subjective. By suggesting that Keynes’s sexuality, among other experiences and identities, helped him to create more nuanced theory, I argue that not only was Keynes not objective, but also that his subjectivity should be applauded and understood as it coheres with feminist theories.

Fourth, throughout this project, I argue that viewing Keynes relationally helps us to understand him more thoroughly. This is significant not just because I posit that life experiences and relationships make the man, but also because viewing Keynes interactionally can help us to understand his work. Wicke’s argument that an “influence study” about the ways Woolf and

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<sup>298</sup> Haraway, 587.

<sup>299</sup> See, for example, David Frum’s “Was Keynes a Better Economist Because He Was Gay?” and Bruce Bartlett’s “Keynes’s Biggest Mistake.”

Keynes had an impact upon each other's work would be trivial<sup>300</sup> is one that appears to be popular throughout much of the scholarship on Keynes. Viewing Keynes as an economist with a tangential private life forces us to view his work as separate from his relationships and interests. In doing so, we divorce his private life from his work and see his theory as "objective" instead of as subjectively based on his lived experiences. An "influence study" is not trivial to understanding topics like modern markets. It is necessary to gaining a full understanding of these topics by framing Keynes as relational.

Lastly, revisiting Keynes's life using feminist theory helps us to see where past biographies and popular understanding of his life falls short. Past biographical scholarship centers his economic theories, his responses to the world wars, and his philosophical groundings. By rereading Keynes through feminist theory, I aim to position him within the gendered social movements of his time. In the early 1900s, the values of Victorian England were changing. Incorporating multiple types of feminism into a rereading of Keynes's life during this time allows us to see the ways he approached women's rights similarly to that of liberal feminists, the ways his experiences of non-normative sexuality gave him a unique standpoint, and the ways his multiple identities intersected to create not just a viewpoint of Keynes, the bisexual, but a viewpoint of Keynes, the male, bisexual, disabled, middle-class, member of Bloomsbury, with a politically active mother. In making these connections, I portray the ways Keynes activated around and believed in the rights of women and homosexuals.

But a feminist rereading of Keynes does not only bring out the ways he showed up for gender justice. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Keynes was anti-Semitic, part of the Eugenics movement, and an imperialist. Past scholarship has glossed over much of his

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<sup>300</sup> Wicke, 12.

involvement with these problematic, racist ideas. However, to side-step these parts of his life is to erase them and to erase how Keynes was a product of his time. Critiquing Keynes for his problematic social views does not undercut my argument that he can be read as feminist. It simply means we have to understand that the feminism we can find in his life is flawed. Many types of feminism have historically been racist and imperialist. Transnational feminist Chandra Mohanty argues that “feminist movements have been challenged on the grounds of cultural imperialism and of shortsightedness in defining the meaning of gender in terms of middle-class, white experiences, internal racism, classism, and homophobia.”<sup>301</sup> Unfortunately, subscribing to racism and imperialism meant that Keynes was typical of the feminists of his time. To problematize those shortcomings does not mean that one needs to reject the whole corpus of either his work or that of his contemporary feminists; it simply means that one must read them all with a critical eye.

Therefore, my feminist rereading of Keynes is significant because it provides additional nuance and “smudginess” to understanding the life of Keynes. This project was not designed to stand alone. In the next section I discuss where additional research is needed.

### **Further Research**

This project is meant to serve as a conversation starter and as a starting point for additional research. There are many places this research can take us, and in this section I focus on two areas. First, I ask many questions throughout this project about Keynes’s life. I examine and question Keynes’s relationships with his mother, Vanessa Bell, and Virginia Woolf. I question why scholars and biographers give these relationships less credence than Keynes’s economic theories, and why there is a gap in the research about Keynes’s feelings on women’s

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<sup>301</sup> Chandra Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 49-50.

rights, gay rights, and the importance of his relationships to his work. Future research should aim to delve deeper, and perhaps archival research conducted using a critical feminist lens could produce answers to these questions.

Additionally, future scholarship should consider the ways Keynes's life history has been smoothed over and the reasons for these erasures. Who benefits from an erasure of Keynes's involvement in the Eugenics movement? Why is it necessary to think of Keynes's sexuality as a transition from homosexuality to a heterosexuality? Answering these questions necessitates feminist theory. Past scholarship has centered the dominant groups: male, white, Western, heterosexual, and middle- or upper-class. In order to grapple with these questions, scholarship must employ theory that supplies an understanding of power dynamics. Hawkesworth argues that "standpoint analysis can raise important issues pertaining to evidence blindness, sanctioned ignorance, and social amnesia."<sup>302</sup> Using feminist theory to guide methodology forces us to look beyond objectivity to interrogate what has been overlooked and why. Future scholarship should study these holes in the story of Keynes's life.

Lastly, this project was not designed simply to focus on the ways Keynes's life was feminist or can be read as feminist. From these arguments, it is vital that further research examine the ways rereading Keynes's life as feminist might have an impact upon further rereadings of his work, including his economic theory, his thoughts on capitalism versus socialism, and his dislike of econometrics, to name a few examples. Additional scholarship needs to question the feminism of Keynes's work. How did Keynes's life impact his work? How did his relationships shape his ideas? Did his beliefs on social issues influence his economic theory? Did his belief in women's rights impact the articles he wrote? Did his adherence to eugenics and

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<sup>302</sup> Mary Hawkesworth, *Feminist Inquiry: From Political Conviction to Methodological Innovation*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 203.



anti-Semitism influence his economic policy suggestions? These are just a few of the questions my research leads to. My project does not have the breadth necessary to complete feminist rereadings of Keynes's economic work. In the future, researchers should seek to answer these questions and interrogate the connection of Keynes's personal and public beliefs.

### **Why This Matters**

Throughout this entire project, I have made arguments that Keynes can be read as feminist, that he held feminist ideals, that past biographers have written about him in biased ways, and that holding specific identities of his as central can help us to see him more clearly. Why does this matter? What does viewing Keynes as feminist mean? What does this project do other than view Keynes through a feminist lens? In Chapter One, I introduced feminist knowledge production, and argued for the importance of viewing Keynes's life using these methods, including: looking at the positionality and cultural circumstances of Keynes,<sup>303</sup> questioning the positionality and preoccupations of his biographers and scholars,<sup>304</sup> and viewing the interconnection between an individual's personal, private experience and their public, or political persona.<sup>305</sup>

First, to answer these questions, we need to step away from Keynes for a moment. Like many areas of scholarship, economics is male-dominated. For example, according to a recent poll, fewer than 30 percent of bachelor's and doctorate degrees in economics are awarded to women.<sup>306</sup> This masculine tradition works to center the importance of "masculine" traits like rationality, logic, objectivity, and analyticity. Why? By centering masculine traits, the discipline

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<sup>303</sup> Joan E. Hartman and Ellen Messer-Davidow, *(En)Gendering Knowledge*, 37.

<sup>304</sup> Hawkesworth, *Feminist Inquiry*, 70.

<sup>305</sup> Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day*, 240.

<sup>306</sup> Tim Harford, "Economics: A Discipline in Need of Diversity," *Financial Times*, November 8, 2016, accessed May 8, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/49a0b63e-a60b-11e6-8b69-02899e8bd9d1>.

of economics can easily reject specific experiences as being outliers. Emotion, anecdotal evidence (or life experience), subjectivity, and other feminine traits are not part of “true” economic theory. Not only does this minimize the importance of femininity and propagate the gender binary, but it also perpetuates the masculine nature of economics. Hartman and Messer-Davidow suggest that although values are based on networks of transactions and social contexts:

traditional academic ideology, however, maintains that we can and should separate our professional from our personal selves, our objective performances from our subjective states. Our education teaches us to conduct our inquiries apart from personal concerns, to exclude our beliefs, values, feelings, political intentions, aesthetic preferences, and other ‘subjective’ states. Feminist knowers subvert this ideology.<sup>307</sup>

This separation of the personal from the professional ensures a guise of “objectivity.”

Furthermore, by continuing to value and center only the masculine, “professional” qualities, the discipline of economics ensures the continuation of its masculinist tradition.

I see this in a few ways. First, in the discipline’s move toward a dependence on econometrics, economists hope to emphasize the ways it can be considered a “hard science” like chemistry or biology.<sup>308</sup> Of course, economics is based on human behavior, which means it has historically been more closely associated with “softer” disciplines like anthropology or philosophy. Centering masculinity has been one of way to avoid relation to softer sciences and to align economics with objectivity and rationality. Additionally, I have seen the ways economics can often be a discipline that is inhospitable to those with non-dominant identities. By emphasizing masculine traits, economists can argue that those who bring emotion, subjectivity, or any feminine traits to the table do not fit. This is one of the reasons there were so few women

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<sup>307</sup> Joan E. Hartman and Ellen Messer-Davidow, *(En)Gendering Knowledge*, 119.

<sup>308</sup> This is not just a problem in economics. See, for example, Patricia Hill Collin’s arguments in her article “Learning From the Outsider Within,” (see Bibliography entry: Hartman and Messer-Davidow’s *(En)Gendering Knowledge*) about this issue within Sociology departments.

in my undergraduate economics classes. Declaring certain traits to be necessary to a study of anything means that there will be those who are excluded simply because of who they are.<sup>309</sup>

The masculine tradition of economics is fundamentally tied to my feminist rereading of Keynes. While my project focuses on Keynes's life, it is designed to ask the question: how does erasing or glossing over certain aspects of Keynes's life perpetuate this masculinist tradition? In what ways does the feminization of Keynes impact the ways we see the economic theory he created? We can see this in the ways some scholars insist on painting Keynes's sexuality as a negative impact on his work. He was gay and did not have children; therefore his theory reflects his bias. Of course, we never question how a dominant ideology impacts the ways individuals create economic theory. For example, why are there no studies of how Milton Friedman's male gender and heterosexuality impacted the work he created? Rereading Keynes using feminist theory allows me to question how Keynes's life experiences impacted his beliefs and work in a way that suggests non-normative experiences are beneficial to theory production.

Lastly, although this project focuses on Keynes, it is broadly applicable. The questions I ask about the connections between identity, life experience, and knowledge production are relevant to many other historical figures. It is fundamental that we position theorists and scholars in order to understand the ways they are subjective. As I have explained throughout, I am not objective. As a feminist, I believe in the importance of creating scholarship that centers gender, racial, sexual, and class-based equality. Keynes was also not objective. His life was messy and his identities intertwined. We need to see each theorist, scholar, and researcher as a product of their own experiences and identities—in all of their complexity.

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<sup>309</sup> For example, *Women of Value*, an anthology edited by Mary Dimand, touches on the importance of women economists in creating the discipline as we know it today, but also looks at the ways most women economists have been erased from this history of economic thought through a failure to cite their work.

My scholarship and feminist rereading of Keynes should be used to create feminist rereadings of other key historical figures as well. We need feminist rereadings of the lives of those who have been credited with creating knowledge in order to understand the ways this knowledge production was subjective and informed by the positionality of the author. While I am interested in feminist rereadings of other famous economists, such as David Ricardo, Adam Smith, or David Hume, feminist rereadings should be applied to other historical figures in other disciplines as well. Specifically, because the lives of famous historical males are virtually never approached this way, feminist rereadings of them will provide radical looks at the individuals who set the foundation for contemporary thought.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this project my goal has been to complete a feminist re-read of Keynes's life. To do this I completed a brief biography, pulling feminist actions, thoughts, and experiences to the center. None of the factual evidence I provide is new. Keynes's life has been written about extensively, and this includes his sexuality, relationships, and life experiences. However, my intervention into the telling of his life does not depend on the presentation of previously undiscovered facts. Through using feminist theories as lenses to view Keynes, I highlighted aspects of his life previously portrayed as peripheral, made connections others have missed, and asked new questions.

When we avoid viewing Keynes through a lens of feminist theory, these connections fade away. Viewing Keynes historically, economically, or psychoanalytically, for example, means that we do not need to question our subjectivities or center marginalized identities. A feminist lens is necessary to a rereading of Keynes because it allows us to see that which has been erased, ignored, and forgotten.

Completing a feminist reading of any topic is often a radical act. But rereading a life using feminist theory is both a radical act and a challenge to past and future scholarship. By pointing to the subjectivity of past biographers and questioning omissions and erasures, I argue that viewing a life using feminism simultaneously adds clarity to that which has been messy and blurs the knowledge we thought was absolute.

As a feminist and activist, it is vital to be critical of information that is passed off as truth. “Truth” has often come in the form of erasure: erasing the experiences of the non-dominant or that which we would rather not remember. In employing this critical eye to the life of Keynes, we can see how the “truth” about an individual’s life as written by others often depends on erasure. By choosing what matters, we denote what does not. A feminist rereading of Keynes does not attempt to create an objectively “true” account of Keynes’s life. Instead, I aim to start a conversation and to question the old ideas. I argue that Keynes was feminist to point out the ways it matters what parts of a life we center and how we read it. Stating that Keynes was feminist is radical and it is a challenge. Of course, new ideas are vital to creating knowledge. But pushing against old ideas is just as significant. As Keynes suggests in the preface to *The General Theory*, “the difficulty lies, not in the new ideas, but in escaping from the old ones, which ramify, for those brought up as most of us have been, into every corner of our minds.”<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> J.M. Keynes, *The General Theory*, viii.

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