



PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Romantic Friendships with Susan Freeman Pt. 1

LEILA RUPP

When I was in my 20s while married to a man, I fell in love with a woman. In the early stages, my new relationship was purely romantic. I thought about her all the time. We talked endlessly on the phone. I gave her presents. I longed to be with her. Eventually, we became lovers. The way we all understood what was going on was that I was really a lesbian and in the process of coming out, but that she was really heterosexual and had just happened to fall in love with me. In the back of my mind, I worried that our relationship might be doomed because how could she love me if she weren't really a lesbian?

And then I found an article called "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America." It was written by historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, and it's now a classic. In it, she shared a correspondence between Sarah Butler Wister and Jeannie Field Musgrave, who met in school in Massachusetts in 1849. I devoured their story. Sarah kept flowers in front of Jeannie's portrait when they were in school together. The intensity of their friendship continued uninterrupted by Sarah's marriage.

At the age of 29, Sarah wrote to Jeannie, "I can give you no idea how desperately I shall want you." And after one precious visit, Jeanie poured out her love. "Dear darling Sarah, how I love you and how happy I have been, you are the joy of my life." She urged Sarah to "just fill a quarter page with caresses and expressions of endearment," and ended her letters with such expressions as "Goodbye, my dearest, dearest lover," or, "A thousand kisses. I love you with my whole soul." Jeanie finally married when she was 37, provoking anxiety on Sarah's part about the impact on their relationship, but their love lived on.

And this was only one of dozens of examples of passionate, intense, loving, physically affectionate relationships that have come to be called "romantic friendships." Smith-Rosenberg uncovered these stories in the correspondence of a wide range of white American middle-class families between the 1760s and the 1880s. What is important about these friendships is that they were widely accepted, even admired, and often lasted from adolescence through marriage and into old age. The supposedly repressive Victorian sexual system in fact allowed a great deal of latitude in moving along a spectrum of what came to be called heterosexuality and homosexuality.

These stories meant a great deal to me, but it wasn't that they made me feel all right about being a lesbian because there had been lesbians in the past, nor was it that what I was feeling was all right because it wasn't lesbian desire. Rather, it was that our modern categories of heterosexuality, homosexuality and even bisexuality were not complex enough to capture the slippery reality of love and desire. The vision of a world in which love and sexuality could have a variety of complicated relations to sexual identity made sense to me. Now, we talk about sexual fluidity, girl crushes, heteroflexibility, bi-curiosity, men who have sex with men.

But in 1975, these were not familiar concepts. The woman I fell in love with and I didn't know where we would end up. We might have stayed together. I might have stayed married and thought of myself as bisexual. She might've come out. So even though she is now married to a man and I am celebrating 40 years together with my partner, Verta, I don't take that to mean that those were the only possible outcomes. What learning about things like romantic friendships does is show how thinking about intimacy and sexuality changes over time. Expressions of love and longing that today we would label lesbian were commonplace in the past, showing students that sexuality has a history.

Understanding that girls in the 19th century might fall in love and express their love and desire openly shows students that history holds a lot of surprises, and that can help them think differently about the present they live in and the futures they will make. I'm Leila Rupp, and this is Queer America, a special series from Teaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center. LGBTQ history has been largely neglected in the classroom, but it's necessary to give students a fuller history of the United States and to help them understand how that history shaped the society they live in.

This podcast provides a detailed look at how to incorporate important cultural touchstones, notable figures and political debates into an inclusive U.S. history curriculum. In each episode, we explore a different topic, walking you through historical concepts, suggesting useful source material and offering practical classroom exercises. Talking with students about sexual and gender identity can be emotional and complex. This podcast is a resource for navigating those challenges so teachers and students can discover the history and comprehend the legacy of queer America.

In this episode, Susan Freeman will introduce us to the history of romantic friendships, same-sex relationships between women in the United States. She'll begin by telling stories of girls who fell in love, expressed their devotion to each other and maintained their love even after marrying men. She'll also provide activities for incorporating romantic friendship into your U.S. history lessons to help students understand that love has a history. Here's Susan Freeman.

SUSAN FREEMAN

Today, general public awareness of same-sex love is at an all-time high. Yet at the same time, the history of same-sex partnerships, romances and flirtations, we can feel pretty sure is not something known to most students of U.S. history. In fact, it would be reasonable for people to imagine that historically, girls' crushes on other girls, adult women forming long-term intimate relationships, that these things were invisible if they existed at all, that they were taboo, that they were unacceptable.

Historians of queer America, however, have found that same-sex couples and intense friendships between girls existed in the past, often fully within view of their neighbors, families and communities. In the 19th and early 20th century, these bonds were more likely to be seen as a curiosity than a threat. When people didn't have labels like homosexual or lesbian at their disposal, two girls falling in love didn't automatically upset the social order. Yes, people in the 1800s and 1900s spread rumors and they shared cautionary tales that suggested there were limits to acceptable same-sex or different-sex affection.

But when girls and young women fell in love with one another, their devotion often found enthusiastic expression, and some degree of community acceptance. Girls' and women's deeply passionate letters, their diaries and evidence of community acceptance in their day brings together queer history with

women's history, which can inform our broader thinking about U.S. history as a whole. Educators can easily present romantic same-sex relationships as they address the changing gender norms and growing opportunities for 19th- and 20th-century women.

So maybe you've read some of the scholarship on LGBTQ history, and if so, you'll probably know that historians tend to argue that queer history is not a straightforward march of progress toward greater liberation, knowledge, and better understanding of sexual and gender minorities. Anyone aware of current events can readily grasp this. So on the one hand, yes, the Supreme Court recently legalized same-sex marriage in the United States, and this was the culmination of generations of activists clamoring to change the second-class citizenship of gay men and lesbians.

But of course right now, many in the queer and trans communities are not terribly secure. The backlash of the past few years reveals that a great number of politically powerful people retain disdain and disgust for queer people, our loves and our families—or at least they're comfortable with being perceived that way. One of the first historians to write on the subject was Carroll Smith-Rosenberg. In her 1975 article she situated same-sex love between women in what she called "The Female World of Love and Ritual." This was the domestic, educational and institutional settings where it was gender appropriate for women to spend the bulk of their time with each other and to express deep care and affection for other women.

Bear in mind now that for most of the 1800s, the concepts that came out of medicine and sexology like inversion and perversion did not exist. At the turn of the 20th century, a new professional literature was proposing a vocabulary and understanding of sexuality in these terms, but the larger public remained oblivious to this emerging system of classification. Women's love and affection for other women in the 1800s was ubiquitous and openly expressed. Whether it was chaste or not is a question we'll come back to. Closeness between women who tended to one another's emotional and physical well-being was central to 19th-century gender scripts.

Embracing and empowering women was a norm for women no matter their sexual proclivities. Remember that 19th-century social life included very little unsupervised time for hetero-social or mixed-sex socializing outside the family unit. Heterosexual mingling opportunities for young people would develop more robustly with the commercialized spaces that arose in the early 20th century, places like dance halls, amusement parks and nickelodeons, but the 19th century was by contrast, a much more homo-social time; and this extended to men as well as women.

Here, my focus is on women's relationships. Nineteenth-century men's romance with other men took a different shape and the patriarchal pass, and if you'd like to explore this topic, see Jonathan Ned Katz's fabulous book, *Love Stories*. Perhaps you already teach about the gender divisions built into the notion of separate spheres, an ideology that arose in the Industrial era. Separate spheres supposed that men belonged in the world of the public: politics, commerce and so on, and women by contrast were relegated to the realm of hearth and home. Smith-Rosenberg's discovery of women's romantic friendships naturally arose in this female world.

Heartfelt and emotionally expressive love letters between women, diaries and other primary documents revealed the norms of literate women, particularly white, privileged women living in the Northeast. Thanks to the survival of documents and letters, at least the ones that didn't get destroyed by the women

themselves or their relatives, we have a glimpse into the sentiments and conventions of women's passionate communication with other women. What they teach us is the substance of women's emotional lives: they allude to painful separations, fond memories and hoped-for reunions.

By looking at such primary sources, we can teach our students to think critically about possibilities for same-sex love in the past. Helena and Molly, for example, kept up a correspondence after they met as schoolgirls in New York City in 1868. In a typical letter written during the intense phase of their romantic friendship, Molly wrote, "I have not said to you in so many or so few words that I was happy with you during those few, so incredibly short weeks, but surely, you do not need words to tell you what you must know. Those two or three days so dark without, so bright with firelight and contentment within. I shall always remember as proof that, for a time at least, I fancy for quite a long time, we might be sufficient for each other.

"We know that we can amuse each other for many idle hours together, and now we know we can also work together." The pair continued writing into adulthood. On the verge of Helena's marriage to a man in 1873, Molly sent a congratulatory note to Helena's husband-to-be, which included the following passage, "Do you know sir, that until you came along I believe that she loved me almost as girls love their lovers. I know I loved her so, don't you wonder that I can stand the sight of you." The bond between Helena and Molly illustrates 19th-century romantic friendships.

Within this category of romantic friendships, historians include intense and youthful schoolgirl crushes like Helena and Molly's, adult longing some women express for female lovers, whether singular or plural, and finally women who opted out of marriage to a man, but embraced the so-called Boston marriage, cohabiting and building a life together with a beloved female partner. It's important to keep in mind that women's romantic love for other women in the past cannot easily or neatly be mapped onto our modern categories of sexual identity. For example, we might be tempted to apply a term like bisexual to women like Helena and Molly, but this is decidedly not a concept in circulation at their time. No one would call themselves bisexual.

But, they seemed to be attracted to, or at least engaged in romantic relationships with both sexes, right? Share with your students why we as historians hesitate to adopt such labels. For one, the thrills, heartbreak or contentment these women experienced in relation to other women in their day did not set them apart from their peers as a particular type. They weren't separated as "others" in relation to heterosexual peers because heterosexual was also not a concept at the time. The modern classifications of heterosexual and homosexual and even bisexual belong to a later age.

Sexual orientation simply wasn't a thing. If you were a girl or a woman who loved another girl or a woman, you didn't have to be any particular kind of person. You might be labeled odd, eccentric or somehow different; people might whisper about you, but you would not be slapped with a label like "sexual deviant." And so, what to say in response to a point-blank question: Were Helena and Molly gay? As a teacher, you can confidently stress that same-sex desire and gender-transgressive behavior in the past is not disputed. Historians have found it everywhere across vast swaths of time all around the globe.

But were people pursuing same-sex attractions equivalent to gay people today? This is a question of terminology and methodology that can help cultivate students' ability to think historically. As an

analogy, consider “teenagers.” This is a term that emerges in the 20th century and it has connotations beyond just a number that ends in the suffix “teen.” Teenagers of the 20th century are a peer group positioned between childhood and adulthood and they develop a particular kind of culture that arises within compulsory schooling and age-segregated classes, the growth of mass media, and a certain set of consumer-mediated rituals and rites of passage.

Did teenagers exist before the 1940s? In the most literal sense, people in their teens? Yes. But, if we take a 14-year-old enslaved youth, a 16-year-old girl sewing in her family workshop, or, say, someone like Pocahontas, the 17-year-old bride of John Rolfe. These people were in their teens, but they weren’t teenagers in the sense of teens that we come to associate with a post-World War Two youth culture. So teenage, bisexual, gay—our present-day vocabulary risks distorting the past. Even though the terms may have simple, agreed-upon dictionary definitions, they’re not terribly portable across time.

The desire to classify people by sexual identity markers anyway is a modern compulsion that Molly and Helena and their contemporaries on the whole did not possess. In this way, looking at past love between women, we can appreciate better that the sex and gender of who you love has not always defined who you are. If it hasn’t always been this way, if it isn’t this way in every place in time, the task of defining and categorizing sexualities can be recognized for what it is: a project that developed at a particular time of social upheaval and intended to separate the “normal” from the “abnormal” as defined by people in power, the not surprisingly self-appointed “normals.”

Equally important, stories of same-sex love in the past show how attitudes and stigma can and do shift over time. This knowledge is deeply empowering to those of us on the margins. Our marginalization is not a God-given inevitability. It’s not evidence of innate inferiority, and it’s not the way things have always been for time immemorial. Our marginalization rather is a result of human or manmade power arrangements. Every day now, it seems like we encounter a new barrage of news about openly expressed racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and anti-queer bigotry.

In this context, history is an important tool for our educational system and for the pursuit of social justice. We must teach our students to question false narratives about the past that legitimates systems of exploitation and exclusion as the proper order of things. Beyond that, we can equip our students to envision and create families, communities and a broader society that respects the dignity of queer people and others who’ve been persecuted for their difference. Consider, for example, the story of Charity Bryant and Sylvia Drake, which draws on the excellent book, *Charity and Sylvia: A Same-Sex Marriage in Early America* by the author Rachel Hope Cleves.

Charity Bryant and Sylvia Drake were two middle-class white ladies who met in 1807 and became a couple for life. In the book, Cleaves details Charity’s backstory, which includes numerous affairs with other young women in her youth. She was very active in pursuing girls’ attention by sending and receiving expressive and affectionate poems and notes, some of which looked back longingly on physical intimacy shared in bed. Charity also boldly moved out of her parents’ home in her early 20s to escape from domestic drudgery. Ultimately, Charity met and became Sylvia’s life partner.

She referred to Sylvia as her helpmate, which is a biblically derived synonym for wife. Sylvia enthusiastically adopted this role, and from the time they met until Charity—who was older by seven

years—died in 1851, the two were inseparable. For four decades, they shared a home and a bed, and ultimately their bodies were united in one burial plot adorned with a single headstone purchased by surviving members of Sylvia’s family. A couple of women, essentially married women, accepted and integrated into the community in the 1800s? It wasn’t like that from the outset.

At first, they had to have the story of going into business together. They took in tailoring as the ostensible reason to set up a house independent of their families. But economic independence was a choice to enable the continued avoidance of heterosexual marriage and to live together. It wasn’t the work that drew them together, and also not all was harmonious at the start. Sylvia’s mother is one example—stubbornly disapproved of them as a couple. Yet she continued to visit and stay for weeks and months at a time throughout the early years of Charity and Sylvia’s life together.

What do we make of the fact that theirs was an intimate and sexual relationship? Cleaves argues that it was an open secret, not unknown, but not openly discussed. As they aged, the couple was increasingly integrated within their Vermont community’s family, social and religious lives. They were widely referred to throughout the community as “Aunt Charity” and “Aunt Sylvia.” An actual nephew of Charity’s, the poet William Cullen Bryant, wrote with reverence about the couple in the 1840s. He paid homage to the “union, no less sacred to them than the tie of marriage, which subsisted in uninterrupted harmony for 40 years during which they slept on the same pillow and had a common purse, and adopted each other’s relations.”

Charity and Sylvia’s remarkably enduring commitment to one another invites us to reconsider some myths about the way things are today as being new and advanced and different from the past. First, we may have an assumption, for instance, that same-sex marriage and same-sex unions are a brand-new phenomenon. We associate them with marriage equality or the rise of gay movements in the late part of the 20th century. However, what we learned from Sylvia and Charity’s relationship and others like theirs is that they don’t depend on legal approval or well-developed social movement campaigns or the formation of urban gay subcultures.

A pre-industrial small town like Weybridge, Vermont, was able to make space for Charity and Sylvia to cohabit and build a life together as partners. And a second myth that we might reconsider: Same-sex relationships have not always been relegated to the margins of society, nor did they evoke universal disapproval and shame. Charity and Sylvia were not pariahs. Sylvia and Charity’s joyful union was recognized and ultimately accepted. That’s not to say that their love didn’t attract gossip or cause some inner turmoil.

Sylvia in particular wrote about struggling with her sinfulness, but she seemed to believe in God’s ultimate forgiveness at the end of the day. The story of Charity and Sylvia leads us to some overarching questions that we might want to address with students while we’re exploring women’s love for women in the past. First, how thinkable or unthinkable was it for girls to fall in love with one another, or for women to become each other’s intimate partners, girlfriends, lovers or spouses?

Was it universally frowned on, as we might assume? Second, what meanings did individuals in their communities make of schoolgirl crushes and long-term committed couples? And then what do their relationships teach us about opportunities and constraints that women faced in U.S. history? Likewise,

how does gender, class, race and region effect the ability women had to prioritize a same-sex relationship. And beyond that, what relationship is there to women’s economic independence, their capacity to pursue a career, or perhaps engage in public service or political activism?

Third and finally, we can address questions about the significance of gender within same-sex marriage. It can get a little complicated because gender normally connotes men and women, also masculine and feminine. But in some regards, their gender was in question, and of course this is easy for your students to see because women were supposed to pair with men in a heterosexual world. Choosing not to pair with a man kind of raised suspicion about what kind of woman you were. So, you can explore with your students, did rejecting male suitors and opting out of patriarchal marriage always go hand in hand with falling in love with women? And how was two women’s femininity or perhaps masculinity perceived within the relationship and also by people outside the relationship?

And this ties into an enduring question that your students may bring to the class. Is one partner supposed to be the man and the other one supposed to be the woman in a same-sex relationship? Where does this idea come from? Why do people think this way?

LEILA RUPP

We’re listening to Susan Freeman discuss romantic friendships and the history of same-sex relationships between women and girls in the United States. This is Queer America. I’m your host, Leila Rupp. While we’re busy launching this podcast, another Teaching Tolerance podcast is wrapping up its first amazing season. Hosted by Hasan Kwame Jeffries, it’s a detailed look at how to teach important aspects of the history of American slavery. You can find our sister podcast, Teaching Hard History: American Slavery in iTunes, or visit tolerance.org/podcasts. Once again, here’s Susan Freeman.

SUSAN FREEMAN

To get into the richness and diversity of women’s relationships in the past, I’m going to talk about two major categories from the historical literature. First, as we’ve been discussing, is romantic friendships. This includes schoolgirl crushes—young women’s affectionate and sometimes erotic connections with other women. Second, I’ll address Boston marriages. If romantic friendships especially took root in all girls’ environments like boarding schools, the Boston marriage involved adult women couples.

These were women who formed households and lifelong or multi-decades-long companionships. With Boston marriages, we find adult women cohabiting and throwing off certain gender restrictions that had constrained many of their mothers and grandmothers. But not always—with a nod to Charity and Sylvia—their aunts. Smashing, raving, mashing and chumming were among popular terms to describe girls’ attraction to one another in the 19th century, so maybe the general idea here is a crush, but these were particular terms that came into usage in different school contexts where girls would describe same-sex love and attraction.

So as an opener to discussing this topic—smashing girls—with your students, you might ask them to share some of the words they use when they are attracted to someone or when they’re interested in forming a relationship with somebody. The nuances are likely to be pretty important to them. I recall in middle school needing to clarify to my parents that people my age did not “go steady”—that was some old-fashioned term. Instead, they would “go with” somebody. So you might pose your students the question,

“Do you have a sweetheart?” Or “Are you courting so and so?” And these kinds of questions are likely to make them laugh. And levity, perhaps some ribbing, about how nobody calls it that.

Generational conflicts about how to name behavior and how to talk about forming relationships are not new, and historical sources can shed light on an adult point of view. We can think of these sources as prescriptive literature, cautioning young people and their parents about signs that they find concerning. In 1897, the *New York Times* magazine published an article about the danger of girls’ love for their peers. And this article can transport your students into a different era’s vocabulary and stereotypes related to girls’ behavior and their loving relationships with one another.

So from October 1897, “Girls Who Fall in Love with Each Other” appears in the *New York Times’* illustrated weekly magazine:

“It may not be known to many readers, and especially those to whom the inner life of a girls’ boarding school is a sealed book, that at the present moment, there are hundreds and indeed thousands of cases of two girls who genuinely ‘love’ one another, or at any rate act as if they do and believe that they do. This ‘love’ is so far as its signs and symptoms go, as fervid and soul stirring as the love between the normal lad and lass. It is characterized by similar jealousies and heart burnings, and is of equal, if not greater intensity.

“In one respect, these irregular love affairs differ from the normal ones. It is almost always the case that the love on one side is much more demonstrative and passionate than the other. That is to say the ‘lovers’ seem always to remain at the wooing stage—the one being coy, standoffish or cold, while the other is ardent, aggressive almost, and intensely jealous. The type of girl who ‘falls in love’ with one of her own sex is not usually difficult to recognize. She is highly nervous or highly strung as it is called, and is characterized by weakness of the emotions, hysteria and morbidity.

“She is generally extremely diffident in the presence of those of the opposite sex, to whom she is an object of little to no interest, particularly perhaps as she is usually plain in face and awkward and clumsy in carriage. She affects the weaker and more emotional of our poets and novelists and is seldom quite robust in health or active in outdoor sports. The girl for whom she develops the tender passion is nearly always older than herself, often considerably so. It having been noticed that the governesses in schools are often marked out for adoration by these girls who love girls.

“The wooed one is somewhat of the same type, but her greater age and often greater self-respect prevent her from manifesting her feelings in quite so marked a manner as her more juvenile wooer. I have recently read some of the letters written by one girl to another, which are for all the world cast in the same mold as are the passionate and often senseless epistles which are read to their huge amusement of jury and spectators alike on occasion of breach-of-promise trials. ‘My dearest,’ one runs, ‘I lay awake thinking of you and you alone nearly all last night. I wonder if you were thinking of me. I do wish I was certain that you loved me as I love you.’ And so on ad nauseam.

“The other letters are really all on a par and it would be uninteresting to quote from them. But it is not in letters alone that these extraordinary weak-minded, foolish, hysterical girls reveal their maudlin ‘love.’

An acquaintance of mine who is a governess in a girls' boarding school overheard the following sensible dialogue between two girls, age respectively, 15 and 17. Younger girl, 'Oh, Katie, I wish you knew how I adore you. I love you better than anyone in the whole world.' Elder girl, 'Hush, Lucy, dear. Think of your mother.' There is no exaggeration in this picture of girl lovers. Every boarding school furnishes examples of this morbid and abnormal affection.

"And although the normal, healthy-minded tennis-playing, cycling, athletic, studious or domesticated girl would shudder at the bare idea of such foolishness, there are many and many girls who possess none of these steady and physical and mentally strengthening attributes. These usually become the typical, confirmed old maid whose affection is ultimately bestowed upon a favorite cat or an overfed dog, which she probably adores in much the same way as she loved her school companion in her younger days."

So you might use this article with your students, perhaps having them read out passages aloud to one another or printing and having them look at it together. And then come up with some questions for your students to consider, and I have three suggestions here.

You might start with asking the question, why would such a story appear in a reputable publication? We don't know if there was a precipitating event, we also don't know if the idea for the story came from the author or from the editor. You can allow a little speculation from your students so they can assess and kind of reinforce their grasp of gender politics of the day. Is the writer a woman? Is she a mother or a school teacher or a journalist? Where does her authority come from? And is there any reason to think perhaps that it's a man?

Next question you might pose to your students, not only why did the story appear in the first place, but why are girls' crushes on other girls newsworthy? Perhaps the author is just trying to inform the public of a phenomenon they don't think people will know about because they're not privy to the "inner life" of a girls' boarding school. And even though the article was full of stereotypes, you may agree with me that it doesn't have a particularly voyeuristic or strongly punitive tone. Still, you might invite your students to discuss its mixed messages. By the conclusion, the explicit lesson seems to be that excessive girl-girl love can lead one to an unhappy life as a spinster, and that discouragement—"Think of your mother"—is warranted. But another read could be, hey, some girls fall in love with their girlfriends. Some women choose not to get married to men and though not everybody would prefer it that way, that's the world we live in—perhaps especially, in the United States where, at least in theory, we value individuals' pursuit of life, liberty and happiness on their own terms. For some people, that involves a same-sex relationship.

And then a third question you might have your students consider: how the author's uneasiness about girls loving girls relates to what's happening as gender expectations shift from the Victorian age to the Progressive era.

The most notable change is the rate at which college-educated women between the 1870s and the 1920s never married. About half of women who graduated from college at the turn of the 20th century chose not to marry compared to about 10 percent of women overall during that time period. So this was a disturbing trend to many observers; there was a lot of advice offered from different quarters about how to address the social unease around women's rejection of marriage. Yet, as beneficiaries of higher education, women—especially professional women—themselves weren't likely to call for an end to women's higher

education in order to preserve the institution of marriage.

Perhaps this writer's seeking to find a way to guide girls back toward thinking about heterosexual marriage as a viable life plan alongside an education. To the author, perhaps the danger's not girls going on to get education, but instead these "irregular"—as she calls them—affections in girlhood, that girls are showing very gendered kinds of mental health disturbances, labeled nervousness or hysteria, and also perhaps too little effort to disguise one's unfeminine or unattractive appearance. So we could imagine that this author is perhaps suggesting a way that girls can pursue an education, but also maintain their attractiveness to men, maintain an interest in the traditional ways of courtship and pursue husbands, motherhood and parenting in a way that would preserve the social order.

Were you or any of your students surprised that the author emphasized physical fitness? You can place this in the context of the new woman of the turn of the 20th century. Not only was she educated, she was also physically active. The author seems to be celebrating these young women who were "quite robust in health," as she puts it, active in outdoor sports. And so rather than being worried about sporty tomboys who maybe are not going to fall for men and going to turn toward women with their affections, the stereotype that's pretty common still today, instead the author seems to find that bookish or physically weak or moody girls are the ones that we should be concerned about.

You might engage your students in dialogue about how shifting boundaries and ideas about what's "appropriate girl behavior" and what's "appropriate boy behavior" might not look the same over different time periods. This can be especially helpful to students whose parents discourage their interests in cross-gender activities, and maybe these are kids who get in trouble at home or perhaps they get policed by their peer groups for being too girly or not girly enough—with terms like homo, fag, gay being thrown around—in order to punish gender nonconformity.

In a history class, examining how stereotypes and gender ideals change over time can be instructive and reassuring, and not just to queer students, but also straight kids, not just to transgender students, but also cisgender people, because our stereotypes and distortions around gender and the relationship between gender and sexuality is very confusing, and policing of gender happens with all populations. You could also explore with your students depending on the parameters of your class, the case of Alice Mitchell, who murdered her beloved Freda Ward in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1892. There was a big court case and trial that was widely publicized that followed, telling the story of 19-year-old Alice Mitchell and 17-year-old Freda Ward, who had fallen in love, made plans to elope and live as a married couple, but when Freda backed out, Alice murdered her.

There's a great book on this topic by Lisa Duggan, the title *Sapphic Slashers*. And this book gives you more details, including primary documents, evidence from the court cases, written testimony of friends. And she analyzes the case with some historical topics that may be already on your course agenda—things like the rise of the mass media and sensationalism in news reporting, as well as the racialized and sexualized discourses of lynching. Now that we've entertained a contemporary adult take on smashing girls or girls who love girls, let's hear from some of the young women themselves. I'm drawing here on collected letters of African-American correspondents named Addie Brown and Rebecca Primus.

Their letters are collected in a volume that's edited by Farah Jasmine Griffin called *Beloved Sisters and*

Loving Friends. If your students have already been introduced to Charity and Sylvia, you can point out a number of common characteristics between them as well as the most obvious contrast—that Charity and Sylvia were white, and Addie and Rebecca were black. All four were literate young women living in the 19th century. Rebecca and Charity both had a vocation as school teachers and Sylvia and Addie both came from slightly more modest backgrounds, but the class contrast was actually greater between Rebecca and Addie: Addie lacked formal education and worked as a domestic servant.

There's also a time and location difference. Although both situated in the Northeast, Charity and Sylvia grew up in the wake of the American Revolution and they were in a small Vermont town of about 750 residents. By contrast, Rebecca and Addie—their correspondence dates to the Civil War and Reconstruction era, and they lived in Northern black communities. Hartford is the hometown of Rebecca and where much of the correspondence was received. It was a thriving urban area where black residents—even though they only made up about 2 percent of the city's population in 1860—numbered 700, was practically the size of the town that Charity and Sylvia lived in, the black community of Hartford.

I'll read several excerpts from some of their correspondence and again, you can find these printed in Farah Jasmine Griffin's book, *Beloved Sisters and Loving Friends*. The full correspondence engages a variety of themes including racial uplift, what's going on in their families and communities, events, what books they've been reading as well as ardent expression of Addie's affection for Rebecca. I'm going to read with broader queer American history themes within the letters. Our first preserved letter—it's one of the earliest—comes from August of 1859. Addie is writing to Rebecca from a town about 30 miles outside Hartford, and she references in her letter a recent visit from Rebecca. She also makes mention of her employer, Mr. James, who seems to have been pursuing Addie. And you might discuss with your students that sexual harassment was not uncommon experience for women working in domestic service.

So Addie's writing to Rebecca:

“My ever dear friend, I no doubt you will be surprised to receive a letter so soon. I think it will be received with just as much pleasure this week as you will next. My dearest, dearest, Rebecca, my heart is almost broke. I don't know that I ever spent such hours as I have my loving friend, it goes harder with me now than it ever did. I am more acquainted with you, it would seem to me this very moment, if I only had the wings of a dove, I would not remain long in Waterbury, although we can't always be together. Oh, it is hard. Oh dear, I'm so lonesome, I barely know how to contain myself.

“If I was only near you and having one of those sweet kisses. Man appoint and God disappoints. There's not much news here worthy to attention. There's going to be a picnic tomorrow, the children's Temperance Jubilee, the Hand of Hope will be celebrated too. It'll be a grand affair. Mister Pete Saint Claire, the well-known apostle of Temperance, will be addressing the gathering. I suppose it is quite gay in Hartford. Oh, my dear friend, how I did miss you last night. I did not have anyone to hug me and to kiss. Rebecca, don't you think I am very foolish? I don't want anyone to kiss me.

“Now, I turned Mr. James away this morning. No kiss is like yours. You were the first girl that I ever love, so it you are the last one. Dear Rebecca, don't say anything against me loving you so, for I mean just what I say. Oh, Rebecca, it seem I can see you now, casting those loving eyes at me. If you was a man, what

would things come to? They would after, come to something very quick. What do you think the matter? Don't laugh at me. I must say, I don't know that I ever enjoyed myself any better than I did when I was at your parents' house. I was treated so rich by all the family, I hope I may have the extreme pleasure of returning the same pleasure to you all.

"Each will remember the visit. As for yourself, dear, there is no one like her, if you was to travel all over the United States. Affectionate friend, Addie. P.S. Give my love to all the family and kiss also to your mother, Addie. Please write soon."

LEILA RUPP

This is Queer America, and I'm your host, Leila Rupp. You can learn even more about romantic friendships and Boston marriages in a valuable collection of essays called *Understanding and Teaching U.S. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History*. This podcast is produced in partnership with the University of Wisconsin Press, publishers of this anthology, which I edited with Susan K. Freeman. It's the first book designed for high school and university teachers who want to integrate queer history into their standard curriculum. From now until the end of the year, the University of Wisconsin Press is offering a 30 percent discount for Queer America listeners who order this collection.

You'll find a link to purchase the book at tolerance.org/podcasts. Just use the promotional code QA PODCAST, all caps. Again, here's Susan Freeman.

SUSAN FREEMAN

"When we are together, our moments are limited. I do not know why it's so, although one comfort I have, is a day coming, there will be no parting. It is very gloomy here. If I was only near you now, I'd rather have my head on your lap than pencil these few lines to you. I'm going to be laid down now. Goodbye until you hear from me again. Yours forever until death parts us, Addie. P.S. Accept a secret kiss, I will imprint on here, so you look good. You may perchance find it, Addie." And then she continues, "I was even so foolish to expect you last evening, but all was in vain, every footstep I heard, thinking it was my loving Rebecca, few days past my love, been toward you more than I can express."

"Dear Rebecca, one thing I am going to say is this: whenever you want me to come down and stay all night, you must tell me. No more until we meet. From your ever dear and loving, Addie. One sweat kiss from your sweat lips." Eighteen sixty-one, the Civil War has begun and Addie relocated to New York City. She was working in the home of a black family as a domestic and caregiver for the couple's nine children. She also helped with sewing, taking in and the family had boarders living there as well.

This was an environment of economic insecurity, irregular paychecks and chaos with so many people living in the same space. Addie, at the time, was 20, Rebecca 25. Addie talks about her suitors and prospects for marriage directly. She asks for Rebecca's understanding in this letter that's sent from New York on February 23rd, 1862. "Darling, my own dear friend. I have again perused your sweet and affectionate epistle. It seems to me that you made every nerve vibrate in me. I could not express the feeling, you spoke of my unexpected visit last Friday, my darling, I don't. That purposely, I must say, I was highly paid for doing so.

"You spoke of enjoying my society, any length of time, all gone. I don't agree with you there, for if I live

long enough, I expect many, many hour with you and alone. Loved one, I want to ask you one question that is: will you not look at my marrying in a different light than you do love me, my darling? I'm here with mother. Perhaps I see you about three time in a year, happy, more time unhappy. I will get my money regular for two or three week and then irregular. What would you rather see me do? Have one that truly love me, that would give me and/or give him up and remain in this home? Or could live with you and either be you parts of the day. I would never, Rebecca, do not feel thus, perhaps it may all be for the best.

“Now, think it over, and tell me whether you agree with me or not. Now, my dearest, I will bring the subject to a close.” And finally, after some other paragraphs, she signs off, “Will you my love, give my love to your mother and the rest of the family. Accept a sweet kiss from you. Ever dear and devoted, Addie. Ps, my dearest, I feel this moment if I could throw my arm around your neck and lay until my soul was in heaven, Addie.”

In 1862, both Rebecca and Addie are again living in Hartford. There's a gap of letters at this time period, probably because they were living in the same town and then there's even a period of a year where we don't have any letters about their relationship at all.

This letter, in January 1864, Addie is writing to Rebecca and it appears that Rebecca has experienced some kind of pain or difficulty and we don't know what that's about. Also, you'll hear that they use nicknames for each other, perhaps terms of endearment. Again, unclear where these come from. Addie refers to Rebecca as Stella and signs the letter from Athena. “My truly love sister, although it's but a few moments since I have left you, I thought while you were discharging your duty, I will pencil a few thoughts to thee. No doubt you would like to know how I got home. Nicely. That loving embrace kept my spirits up until I reach home. I spent a very pleasant day.

“Dear Stella, you don't know how bad I felt to see you in so much pain and to think I could not do anything to help. Oh, my darling, don't eat any more sweet effect for they do not agree with you. I know that I love you, I never could feel as I did. My sympathize was so great that I had straight pain. I often heard, but I would not believe them, I know by experience. Dear Stella, do you ever think of our visit last summer? I do very often. Sometime, I think it's all of dreams. What happy days those was. Will they ever come again? Oh, don't say no. I live in hopes that we'll be together, nothing will separate us, but death.

“While sitting on your lap, I had a very thrilling sensation pass through me today. Did the same occur to you? I ask, you would not tell me. Sister, why will you prefer darkness sometime instead of light? I suppose you wonder what I mean. Well, I will tell you. All day, I have trying to have you tell me something that you would not until you sleep with me. Why can't you make up that with me? Don't you think we can love each other the same? You know my dear, just what I mean. Come, let us try. Oh dear, here come somebody to disturb me.” She continues, “I am sorry that I can't have you to sleep with me tonight. Perhaps it's all for the best. Now, my darling sister, I must leave you a little while. It's 9:00 a.m. I guess you were thinking about letting your school out. I hope you will not. I hope you will have a pleasant night rest. Accept a kiss goodnight. Your sister, Athena.

“To Stella,” she closes with a poem. “I will never forget thee darling though thou art far from me. I'm ever of thee thinking my heart belongs to thee. Of thee by day, I ponder; of thee by night, I dream. This world without thee darling, a lonely place would seem.”

Their correspondence continues until February of 1868. If you want to take a look at the later correspondence in Griffin's book, you can find letters suggesting that Addie's been flirting with some other girls and accepting their affectionate attentions. That April, you'll also learn that Addie's engaged to and marries a male suitor. And sadly, Addie dies two years later at age 28 from tuberculosis.

Some questions and activities that you can use with your students. First, you could try to link the letters to the *New York Times* piece about girls who fall in love with girls. When the story appeared in the 1890s, Rebecca would have still been alive in her 60s, but the *New York Times* article was undoubtedly written by a white author with white girls and white readers in mind. So you can consider with your students: Do any of the warnings that the author offered seem applicable to Addie's and Rebecca's love? What doesn't apply or what might have changed between the 1860s and 1890s? And as a point of similarity, you can note that Addie is the younger and seemingly more assertive of the pair, and that fits the age profile that was described by the *New York Times* author.

It's also true that Addie is the one to marry first, in her early 20s, and Primus marries later in her 30s. And actually, neither one of them ends up as an old maid. You could see what else your students notice as similarities or differences about the patterns of girls' romantic love toward other girls. The second thing you could do, especially if you've introduced them to Charity and Sylvia, is have them consider the similarities and differences between Charity and Sylvia's relationship, and Rebecca and Addie's relationship. And, of course, one of the main commonalities is that writing was a really important way for them to express their affection toward one another, especially when they're living apart, and that their ability to connect with other women was enhanced by literacy.

They also were readers who read books about women's friendships and romantic love and they use similar language and communicating thoughts with terms of endearment and feelings of loss and separation when they were apart. It's also interesting that in both cases we have more evidence from one writer than the other. In the case of Addie and Rebecca, we only have Addie's side of the correspondence. And Charity and Sylvia were both writers, but we have much more evidence that comes from Charity's pen. In terms of dissimilarity, we can find that Charity and Sylvia, for example, completely opted out of marriage, whereas Addie and Rebecca did find husbands, ultimately.

Also, you can see that Charity, who was older, was clearly a pursuer in the Charity and Sylvia relationship. She was also the more husband-like in their relationship—she was older and more economically privileged. And then you see a little bit of a contrast between Rebecca and Addie. Rebecca had more social and economic power, being from a relatively privileged free black family. She was older but seems not to have adopted the masculine prerogatives in relation to Addie. Rebecca, I may not have mentioned, was working in a Reconstruction era—school in the South, in Maryland, and so in this way, she was similar to Charity, who also sought out school teaching as a path toward independence. But in Rebecca's case, she was also participating in a tradition within her family: a gender-appropriate way to continue the legacy of racial uplift.

Another thing you can point out as a contrast is that Charity and Sylvia, very early in their relationship, determined to be exclusive partners to one another, whereas in couples like Addie and Rebecca, they didn't rule out marrying, and that was pretty typical of romantic friendships. This is a phenomenon that's been identified from the earliest scholarship, "The Female World of Love and Ritual" in 1975 by Carroll

Smith-Rosenberg, and many other historians, including Leila Rupp, our podcast host and author of many books, including *Sapphistries: A Global History of [Same-Sex] Love between Women*, as well as Lillian Faderman, whose work we'll be addressing later in the podcast.

Yet another activity you could do with your students is to have them examine the text of the letters. If you want to print them out, you can get copies from Griffin's book. Again, the title is *Beloved Sisters and Loving Friends*. And then with the text in hand, invite the students to notice the terms of endearment, words that are used, whether they're repeated or capitalized or underlined. Also, what words seemed to be missing? There's an occasional question mark too where the interpretation of the handwriting might be in question. For teachers of literature, there's a whole lot you could do with the letters between Rebecca and Addie. You could also have them look at Charity and Sylvia's correspondence and writing.

There's lots of examples of that, again, in Rachel Hope Cleves' book by the title *Charity and Sylvia*. If you're teaching in a literary context, you could use these texts. Another option would be to use the letters and poems of Emily Dickinson to Sue Gilbert, her sister-in-law, to whom she wrote romantic poetry. The texts that Dickinson wrote, poems and letters, are of a similar vintage and intensity to those of Charity and Sylvia, and Rebecca and Addie. With your students, you could explore the language, the ways they might use euphemism for sex or other kinds of erotic exchanges, their allusions to religion, to landscape, to other literature and so on.

It could make for a rich conversation about what are the conventions of love poetry written from women to women as compared to the correspondence and poetry between men and women. And ask your students to think about what feelings that are expressed in the letters and poems—how do they adhere to the gendered expectations of the era and how do they maybe contradict what women are supposed to like, think and do? Should we avoid using our 21st- century terms, words like lesbian, bisexual, et cetera, to define lady lovers of the past? I think we should. Still, what we can do is apply these insights about the past to how we think about the present.

With Rebecca and Addie, historians have good reason to conclude that the relationship was mutually romantic, but questions about the sexual nature of women's friendships are tough to unravel. The evidence is sometimes ambiguous. Here you can capture your students' attention by having them think about not just the artifacts of the past, but those from their own time, asking them to think about and consider how revealing it is to encounter, say, a collection of text messages, a sequence of Snapchats, a certain picture on a website. Do these artifacts reveal truths? Ask them, when historians look back to today, what sense will they make of relationships, sexuality, identities? Are these a more reliable source or would you rather see reflections on one's past— your youthful attractions, relationships, flirtations and so on—from the point of view of adulthood?

Students will have many opinions, and the subjective nature of our emotions and relationships makes this subject quite an uncertain one, especially when we're looking in on relationships from the outside. However, these uncertainties are not a problem. For one, they keep historians in business as we evaluate and re-evaluate evidence and claims drawn from original source material. As we try to make sense of stories from the past, most queer historians are just not to assume that same-sex relationships were identical counterparts of today's LGBTQ relationships. By the same token, we also need to guard against the erasure of queer lives, the presumption that everyone in the past is straight and the myth that same-

sex desire was unthinkable and unexpressed in supposedly less enlightened and more restrictive time.

LEILA RUPP

Susan Freeman is an associate professor and chair of Gender and Women's Studies at Western Michigan University. She and I co-edited the anthology that is the basis of this podcast. And this episode is inspired by a chapter on romantic friendship by Dáša Frančiková. Susan is the author of *Sex Goes to School: Girls and Sex Education Before the 1960s*. Her current research examines the development of gay and lesbian studies classes beginning in 1969. In our next episode, Dr. Freeman will continue this exploration of romantic friendships in U.S. history, focusing on often-public relationships between women that came to be called "Boston marriages," so be sure to listen.

Queer America is a podcast from Teaching Tolerance in partnership with the University of Wisconsin Press. They're the publisher of the award-winning anthology, *Understanding and Teaching U.S. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History*. In each episode, we're featuring a different scholar to talk about material from a chapter they authored in that collection. Use the code QA PODCAST, all caps, to get a 30 percent discount when you purchase the book through tolerance.org/podcasts.

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This podcast was produced by Shea Shackelford, with production assistance from Russell Gragg. Kate Shuster is our project manager. Music in this episode is by Chris Zabriskie. So, what did you think? Let us know on Facebook and Twitter, review us in iTunes, and please tell your friends and colleagues about this podcast. I'm Dr. Leila J. Rupp, professor of feminist studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and your host for Queer America.