

The **Pinterest** of the Nineteenth Century

The Appeal of Ideal Womanhood in *Godey's Lady's Book*

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What is Ideal Womanhood?

According to historian Barbara Welter, ideal womanhood is the embodiment of four traits: **piety**, **purity**, **domesticity**, and **submission**. In addition to these attributes, this thesis suggests a fifth characteristic—**refinement**.



Conclusion

Godey's Lady's Book was essentially the Pinterest of the 19th century. The ready appeal of its sentimental stories, dewy poems, eye-catching prints, and DIY patterns, as well as the opportunity-enhancing articles worked to infuse the concepts of ideal womanhood into the minds of the subscribers, both consciously and subconsciously encouraging women to become the best their sphere could offer. Though *Godey's* eventually strayed from its promotion of ideal womanhood and subsequently lost its appeal, the concept has not been forgotten. Today's ideal womanhood may look different, but is not dead. Whether flipping through the pages of a magazine or scrolling down a webpage, women then and now strive to fulfill their assigned—or chosen—roles. **What could have been drudgery, with *Godey's* and Pinterest, has become a delight.**

Research Questions

1) How did *Godey's* attractively present the concepts of ideal womanhood?

Godey's masterfully intertwined ideal womanhood with literature, patterns, and images already appealing to women, effectively marrying women's burdensome expectations with pleasure.

2) How did *Godey's* expanded concept of ideal woman aid in its appeal?

Godey's also heightened the appeal of ideal womanhood by endorsing female education and opening career opportunities to the fairer sex, revealing an appealing new edge of ideal womanhood without straying towards feminism.

3) How did *Godey's* lose the appeal of the ideal woman?

In the postbellum period, both the "new woman" and the "ideal woman" vied for dominance. By trying to appeal to both types of women, *Godey's* lost touch with its original mission. It failed to attract a substantial audience from either crowd, and sank into the archives of history.

Abstract

Feminist historians are quick to label the concept of ideal womanhood as highly oppressive drudgery for their 19th century predecessors. However, by examining the contents of *Godey's Lady's Book* throughout its existence (1830-1898), this thesis shows how *Godey's* increased the palatability of the traditional woman's role through the content they published, and the ways in which they expanded the woman's sphere. While *Godey's* was unable to exert its influence on the next generation of "new women" at the end of the century, it successfully boosted the appeal of ideal womanhood for over 30 years. **Like the Pinterest of the 21st century, *Godey's Lady's Book* showed 19th century ladies that ideal womanhood could be fun.**

