ONE

SIDEWALKS AND STREETCARS

Oh, I have no language to express myself about the cars. I waited in a pouring rain for a half hour for the Castro, and not one came. Then I took the Valencia, stood up and walked up the hill in the mud. Merry Xmas.
—Annie Haskell, December 25, 1906

WHEN WOMEN LIKE ANNIE HASKELL went out in public, whether shopping, going to the theater, visiting, or for any other purpose, they took to the streets in order to get to their destinations. Streets, streetcars, and ferries made up a web of transportation that connected domestic spaces to one another and to other landscapes. The streets and the public transportation that ran on them were thus the most commonly encountered and inhabited public spaces for women. They were also the spaces in which women were most publicly visible. Even in the highly domestic and feminine world of visiting, most women (those without personal carriages) walked on the streets or took streetcars and, in San Francisco, ferries to get from their parlors to their friends’ parlors. As expressed in Annie Haskell’s diary entry, the experience of the transportation landscape was often frustrating, particularly for nonelite women, challenging their control over their time and their appearance in public, because transferring between and waiting for streetcars made it necessary for women to loiter on the streets and sometimes to get soaked in the rain.

Women’s use of public transportation increased in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for several reasons. As cities expanded and housing was
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increasingly segregated in neighborhoods with only a small number of shops and businesses, women were more likely to have to travel in order to do errands and to frequent amusements. In this period women’s reasons for going out also increased. Shopping became a more central activity with the increase of ready-made goods and with the expansion of new forms of retailing, such as the department store. Commercial entertainments and restaurants became a larger part of the lives of all people, and particularly those of women. In addition, an ever-increasing number of women had to travel daily in order to go to work. In California, as in the rest of the United States, the number of women working increased steadily from the mid-nineteenth century into the early twentieth. In 1880, only 8 percent of women in California worked for money, while by 1910, 17 percent of California women worked.1 Not only did an increasing number of women work, but also the work they did was increasingly likely to take them away from their immediate neighborhoods. The largest growth in women’s jobs was in white-collar positions, particularly in clerical work but also in sales, the professions, and management. Service positions outside private households, such as waitressing and hotel work, also increased significantly.2 Both white-collar and commercial service workplaces tended to be located downtown, so women commuted in increasing numbers, alongside the men they worked for.

However, the increasing presence of women on the streets and streetcars was often problematic, as it conflicted with powerful ideas about the masculinity of public spaces. In order to present themselves as respectable, middle-class women were required to maintain a bubble of privacy around them in public even as they joined the throngs on downtown streets and crowded streetcars. At times the built landscapes they encountered helped them with this social task, but more often it made the task more difficult. By examining the imagined, built, and experienced landscapes of transportation in San Francisco in this chapter, I explore how ideas about women on the streets and on public transportation, as well as in the other spaces they inhabited, changed from the late nineteenth century into the twentieth. I argue that for middle-class women, the experienced landscape was shaped by a number of improvised strategies they used to negotiate a built landscape in which their presence was imagined as unnatural.

Etiquette books reveal how attitudes toward women on the streets and on streetcars and their behavior there changed from the high Victorian era to the early twentieth century. As John Kasson argues in Rudeness and Civility, etiquette books are a rich source for recovering “changes in cultural practices, conduct, and consciousness” that attended urban transformations in the nineteenth century.3 Etiquette books are, of course, conservative; they reflect upper-middle-class ideals rather than the ideals of a wider range of classes or the actions of the members of any class. However, looking at changes in descriptions of proper behavior in these
books provides a sense of trends in behavior and attitudes that transcend the class dictating etiquette rules. When common behaviors changed significantly, the rules eventually had to react in some way in order to retain their credibility. Etiquette books also give us clues about changes in behavior so ordinary, like taking streetcars, that they were only rarely discussed in diaries and other firsthand sources.

**Imagining the Streets**

For a polite woman in the late nineteenth century, the task of negotiating the street was nearly impossible. A woman on the street had to interact with her equals and be invisible to her inferiors. As detailed in 1882’s *Our Department*, “The true lady walks the street, wrapped in a mantle of proper reserve, so impenetrable that insult and coarse familiarity shrink from her, while she, at the same time, carries with her a congenial atmosphere which attracts all, and puts all at their ease.” Her dress, which “must never be conspicuous,” her mode of walking, her gaze, and every aspect of her behavior went into making her nearly invisible and separated from the social space around her. At the same time, she was required to be congenial and attractive, “recognizing acquaintances with a courteous bow and friends with words of greeting.” She had to be open to acquaintances but at the same time preoccupied, thereby “secure from any annoyance to which a person of less perfect breeding might be subjected.” Late-nineteenth-century advice to women about their behavior on the streets can be summed up by the admonition to act so as to “escape all observation.” A polite woman is “always unobtrusive, never talks loudly, or laughs boisterously, or does anything to attract the attention of the passers-by.” It was particularly important for her to talk quietly when out of doors and to control her body and use of space, never swinging her arms when walking and certainly never skipping, running, whistling, or yelling.

Unobtrusive public dress and manners became markers of middle-class status, while working-class norms of self-presentation in public did not emphasize invisibility. The distinction between visible working-class women and unobtrusive middle-class women served to reinforce the dichotomy of dangerous and endangered women, which Mary Ryan argues ruled the understanding of American women in public by 1880. The visibility of working-class women marked them as potentially dangerous, especially because it attracted the gaze, which was associated with prostitutes, for whom being sexually attractive in public was an essential part of their trade. In contrast, the ideal invisibility of middle-class women, who were understood to be endangered by any contact with unknown men and dangerous women, both helped to distinguish them from poorer women and made them less attractive to the gazes of dangerous men. While for middle-class women
Women and the Everyday City: Public Space in San Francisco, 1890-1915

the street was primarily a space moved through, and sociability occurred in large part within their own and others’ homes, for working-class women the street was itself a major space of sociability. Their homes were often crowded, and the street provided young working-class women a freedom they could not find in a space ruled by their parents. Stylish clothing, worn on the streets and in other public places, was an important aspect of young working women’s culture. Through clothing, working women could play with the signifiers of “ladyhood” and aristocratic culture and could mark their economic independence through their ability to buy their own finery.

Middle-class women’s unassuming public presentation of self was part of the “sincere” fashion begun in the 1840s, in which the public self was to reflect the inner virtue of the domestically focused ideal woman.13 This particularly American style included not only dressing and acting as unobtrusively as possible in public but also following fashion at a distance, rather than being up-to-date. Publications such as Godley’s Lady’s Book published English and French fashions well after they were shown in Europe, and in The Age of Innocence, middle-aged ladies complained of the changes since their youth in the 1840s, when “it was considered vulgar to dress in the newest fashions . . . the rule was to put away one’s Paris dresses for two years.”14

Not only were polite women advised to make themselves invisible to others’ senses as much as possible, but they were also to restrain their own sensory engagement. Several etiquette books summed up this advice: “A lady walks quietly through the streets, seeing and hearing nothing that she ought not to see and hear.”15 Other books also addressed women’s vision, advising women never to look behind themselves and to walk on the streets “neither looking to the right or to the left.”16 The admonition to restrain the gaze was combined with advice not to stop on the street. When men met with a woman of their acquaintance on the street, they were told to walk with her rather than stopping to speak. Women were advised not to “stop to chat with a friend in the middle of the sidewalk.”17 Elite commentators imagined that women were on the streets purely to get from one place to another. Any behavior that interrupted this purposive activity was problematic, especially as stopping would increase their public exposure. In addition, spending time on the street meant risking being mistaken for a working-class girl or, worse, a prostitute. Polite middle-class women were not meant to be seen participating in the public space of the street: they were to remain as invisible as possible, not to see or hear what went on around them on the street and not to stop and spend extra time in the street.

By the late nineteenth century, this fairly long-standing advice was increasingly challenged by modern merchandising methods, which depended on women seeing posters, billboards, advertisements, and store windows. This required women
both to see the world around them and often to stop as well, in order to read the frequently wordy texts or to look carefully at window displays. At least one early etiquette book rejected this advertising culture, writing in 1879, “A lady who desires to pay strict regard to etiquette, will not stop to gaze at the shop windows. It looks unchivalrous. If she is alone, it looks as if she were waiting for someone; and if she is not alone, she is victimizing some one else, to satisfy her curiosity.” However, as window displays became an increasingly important aspect of merchandising, advice changed to meet practice. By 1891, Annie White’s Polite Society At Home and Abroad reversed earlier advice. Although White wrote that women should look neither right nor left when walking and should “never hear a rude remark, or see an impertinent glance,” she also admitted, “If anything in a store window attracts her notice she can stop and examine it with propriety, and then resume her walk.” Although the admonition not to look at other people remained, looking at shop windows, which explicitly courted the female gaze, became an acceptable behavior. Window shopping in fact was extremely common well before etiquette guides condoned it. It was a popular form of entertainment for a range of women, especially those who could not afford the goods they admired through the glass.

What was written about women’s behavior on the street also changed in other ways to reflect changing practices. Although etiquette books continued to suggest that women should dress and behave unobtrusively in public, the context in which they did so changed. Books written in the nineteenth century advised quiet clothing and behavior but gave no intimation that actual behavior might be otherwise. In contrast, later books gave the impression of holding up a dying practice. For example, in the 1901 Book of Good Manners, Mrs. Kingsland complained, “The old rule, ‘Dress so as to pass unobserved,’ seems to have changed to ‘Dress so as to challenge admiration or attention,’” but argued that whatever the common practice was, “in the street elaborate dressing is always in bad taste.”

A shift in women’s walking alone at night made it harder to distinguish between respectable women and prostitutes. Etiquette books from the 1890s and earlier advised a young woman that she “would not be conducting herself in a becoming manner by walking alone” and that she should always arrange for an escort home from any evening activity. The streets after dark were presumed to be, in part, a space of prostitution, and thus a woman who ventured out on the street alone after dark compromised her dignity. Going out at night alone also courted physical and class danger, because in doing so a woman exposed herself to “indignity at the hands of a rougher class.” This fear of the lower classes, and immigrants in particular, marks the statement, “in New York, with its large foreign population, many ladies do not like to go out in the evening without an escort.” However, women in many cities were increasingly going out in the evening unescorted. As noted in a 1911 guide, women were taking the streetcars alone at night:

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How great would be the surprise of a foreigner of distinction if he should happen to catch a glimpse of the interior of a Boston trolley-car, at that time in the evening when the performances at the theatres and concert halls have just come to an end! If you should tell him that those groups of ladies without any attendant cavalier belonged to “Boston’s best,” and that the friendly trolley-car would carry them safe and unmolested almost to their very doors, he would scarce believe the testimony of his ears.26

In spite of the potential dangers of the night, this guide also observed, “The use of electric lights in our cities is making women less timid. Where the streets are brilliantly lit and well-polic’d, there is little danger of annoyance.”27 Street lighting alone is insufficient for explaining a change; gaslights had lit the streets for many years before the advent of electric light and were championed for making streets safe as early as the seventeenth century.28 But the language used in this description, of timidity and annoyance, rather than indignity and bodily harm, marks a shift in which the streets at night were imagined as rightfully a space of women.

In spite of the real shifts in etiquette pertaining to street behavior, for both middle-class and working-class women, the streets remained, and remain to this day, an often problematic space, where women’s respectability and control of their own bodies is potentially menaced, particularly after dark. However, those changes that have occurred are significant. In particular, the changes in street behavior and norms in the etiquette books I have surveyed include a number of shifts in which street behavior moved toward working-class norms, redefining them as modern and middle-class. In dressing in noticeable rather than drab clothing, spending time on the street looking at windows and signs, and walking on the streets at night without a male escort, the respectable women described in the etiquette books claimed the streets as a space of their own, to enjoy and use without fear. In this they followed the lead of working-class women, who, as we’ve seen, used the street as a primary space of sociability.29

Imagining Men and Women on Streetcars

While the streets were a pure public space, open to and used by all, streetcars were imagined as somewhat more complex. Unlike streets, streetcars were small, enclosed spaces. This difference made questions of streetcar etiquette more problematic, because people were forced to be in close proximity to strangers much more than they were on the streets. One could even consider the interior of a streetcar to be like a very small, public parlor. In addition, streetcars were commercially run, and all those who rode on them paid for the privilege, in contrast to the street, which was accessible to all and publicly owned. This complicated the understanding of the rules of behavior governing streetcars, as they were not precisely those

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of the street, or of the parlor, or yet of other publicly accessible commercial spaces, such as theaters. The difficulty in determining what sort of space streetcars were and what rules should apply fueled highly fraught discussions of whether men should give up their seats to women. Nineteenth-century etiquette books agreed that the rule that men should code their seats to women was absolute. However, the discussion of this rule shifted in significant ways from the 1880s through the 1920s. In the 1870s and 1880s etiquette writers focused on men’s behavior in this exchange, emphasizing the necessity of giving a seat to women on streetcars and the advisability for “a gentleman of genuine breeding” to do the same on railway cars. Over time the burden of etiquette shifted from the man, who was obliged to give up a seat, to the woman, who had to behave politely and gratefully if she wished to have a seat. Later manuals included increasingly lengthy descriptions of the poor manners of American women, who were “too prone to take this altogether optional courtesy on the part of men as a matter of course, deserving no thanks at their hands, or to look upon its omission as an infringement of their rights.”

Several early-twentieth-century etiquette books argued that the extreme rudeness of women who were given seats in streetcars led to the decrease in the practice of men giving their seats to women. Although not explicitly stating that men were not obliged to give up a seat to women, etiquette experts gave men a good excuse for not doing so. The 1922 parody Perfect Behavior summed up this discourse on streetcar behavior in its mock advice to a woman streetcar traveler:

She should enter the car. At the opposite end of the car there will undoubtedly be three or four vacant seats; instead of taking one of these she should stand in front of some young man and glare at him until he gets up and gives her his place.

It is not customary in American cities for ladies to thank gentlemen who provide them with seats.

In this quotation, women’s impoliteness in demanding a seat is the focus of censure; men are merely hapless victims.

Another significant shift was in the reasoning behind giving up seats on streetcars. In earlier handbooks, men were instructed to give a seat to a woman because to do otherwise would be ungentlemanly. No further explanation was deemed necessary; a woman’s status as a woman was sufficient reason for her to be given a seat, given the parlorlike space of the streetcar and women’s imagined endangered nature in public. Later etiquette manuals provided a reason why a man should give a seat to a woman, arguing, “Unless a man is very tired indeed he is better able to stand in a car than a woman and he knows it.” Once the ability to stand became a gauge of appropriate behavior, the question of giving up streetcar seats shifted from a question purely of gender to one that also admitted age, infirmity, and tiredness, which sometimes overturned the earlier gender rules. Rather than
discussing the etiquette of giving up seats for women, guides such as the 1913 *Pat
tem’s Handbook of Etiquette* spoke of a man “resigning his seat to a woman, an
invalid, or an elderly member of his own sex.” With this shift to need rather than
gender as the basis for a claim on seats, not only were men required to give up
seats in favor of others, but so also were women. For example, the 1905 manual
*Everyday Etiquette* argued that a young woman should resign her seat in favor of
a woman with a baby in her arms, an elderly woman, or an elderly or infirm man.35
Just as with men, this practice should cross class boundaries, as in the 1901 advice
book *To Girls: A Budget of Letters*, which describes the nobility of a healthy young
woman who gave her seat to “a working-woman with her arms full of bundles.”36

This episode was used to emphasize that true good American manners meant:
treating those of a lower class position well, not using etiquette to emphasize class lines.

The discussion of comparative need gave men an excuse for not giving up a
seat to a well-rested, upper-middle-class woman. As early as 1891, in *Polite Society
At Home and Abroad*, the “moot question whether it is the duty of a gentleman to
rise in a street car and offer his seat to a lady” was discussed in terms of relative
tiredness as much as gender, arguing, “It might be asserted that a man is weary
after a hard day’s work in office or store.”37 Margaret Sangster, in the 1904 *Good
Manners for All Occasions*, added to this discussion the idea that a man had a right
to a seat because he had paid for it.38 In this argument, streetcars had moved from
being like a parlor, where a man should serve a woman, or the street, where he
should defer to her, and were instead seen as more parallel to commercial public
spaces like theaters, where consumer rights were paramount, and no man would
be expected to give up his seat to anyone else.

The shifting ideals of streetcar seat behavior and the fraught discussion of the
issue are evidence of changing imagined relationships between men and women
in public space. The primary causes for changes in etiquette, as acknowledged in the
etiquette books themselves, were women’s increasing use of streetcars and women’s
expanding roles in the workforce, which combined to normalize women’s pres-
ence on streetcars. As discussed in the Introduction, the downtown shifted gender
throughout the day; therefore, women who rode streetcars as shoppers often rode
at different hours from those of commuters, making streetcars a feminine space
in the middle of the day. In the morning commute hours the population was more
masculine, although in the evening it may well have been mixed. Early on, some
midday streetcars along San Francisco’s Sutter Street, leading from an upper-
middle-class residential area to the downtown shopping district, were even design-
nated as “shoppers’ specials” and were populated entirely by women.39

However, as an increasing number of women worked at a range of clerical jobs
in downtown offices and at shop-clerk jobs in downtown shops, they became “con-
stant riders at the busy hours, and thus [came] into direct competition with men,”
causing men not to cede their seats, as W. C. Green commented in the 1904 *A Dictionary of Etiquette*. Margaret Sangster argued that the changes in women’s status resulting from their increasing presence in the workforce were the most important determination of streetcar behavior. She declared that men had ceased to offer seats to ladies in large part because of “the increasing independence of women who compete with men on equal terms in every industrial field, and who, in becoming equals and competitors, have ceased to be superiors.” The changing gender order of workplaces and public transportation led to men’s becoming increasingly accustomed to sharing space with women outside the home. As Marshall Everett wrote in *The Etiquette of Today* in 1902, “Men are now seldom free from the presence of women, no matter what their vocation. The sexes work side by side in the counting room, the editorial room, the printing office, the studio, the hotel, the restaurant, the university, and the forum.” In these rationalized spaces of work, old systems of gendered conduct could quickly become obsolete. Customs that involved men’s deferring to women were particularly poorly suited to the business world, because women were usually in positions that were subordinate to men. Treating a woman with deference was largely incompatible with maintaining one’s superior status and ordering her to do work. Despite Margaret Sangster’s assertion that women were changing from men’s superiors to their equals, women were in fact serving as their subordinates. After being served by women in the office or shop all day, men might not choose to defer to the same women by offering them seats on the streetcars on the way home. Gender alone would not necessarily give working women greater rights to a seat in the eyes of men, who were their social superiors and who were accustomed to being served by women both at home and in the office. Thus increasingly, class became more important than gender in dictating the practical application of seat-giving etiquette.

These changes in streetcar etiquette are a sign of changes in women’s practices and in women’s social roles. As more and more women took streetcars at all hours of the day, whether for shopping, visiting, or work, they became ordinary riders, on an equal social footing with the men who rode the streetcars. The contradictions between an ideology that saw women as endangered, frail, and only rarely in public and the reality of large numbers of women riding the streetcars every day and working with and for men in offices and shops led to this ongoing debate over men ceding streetcar seats to women. As practices changed, so did ideology, so that women were no longer seen as inherently frail, at least while on streetcars, and the right to a seat became embodied in need rather than purely in gender. Both on the streets and in streetcars, changes in experience helped to lead to changes in ideology. As respectable women walked on the streets at night and respectable men kept their seats on streetcars, the imagined landscape shifted to accommodate experience. However, women in public have remained problematic, and neither
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the question of women on the street at night nor that of giving up seats on public transportation has been entirely resolved, even in the present day. In turn-of-the-century San Francisco, women who used the streets and streetcars and wished to be respectable found that the built landscape of the streets and public transportation at times facilitated, but more often frustrated, attempts to follow the spatial practices imagined in etiquette books.

The Design of Streetcars and Ferries

Streetcars were initially designed to express middle-class ideals but also often made it difficult for women to practice the reserve required by those norms. Early streetcars, as well as ferries, were designed for attractiveness. Decorative metalwork and carefully painted exteriors complemented simple wooden seats on streetcars and cable cars (Figure 1.1), while on ferries shipshape exteriors were complemented by simple but elegant interiors, often of polished teak and other woods (Figure 1.2). In his history of streetcars, The Time of the Trolley, William Middleton writes that streetcar decoration, both interior and exterior, was “often lavish in the extreme,” with the exterior involving at a minimum two weeks in the paint shop. Interiors used multiple hardwoods and occasionally colored glass and hand-painted designs. In 1892, one author argued for streetcar decoration: “Not only should a reasonable amount of decoration be provided in cars which are patronized wholly by a cultivated class of people, but in all cars, for by this means the comforts and solaces of fine art will be brought to a large number of lives and hearts that cannot afford to provide them in their own homes.” Thus streetcars, while used by all, were built and decorated initially according to middle-class norms, with the ideal of making everyone in them conform to the ideals of the middle class. Similarly, the ferries, while serving as regular public transportation, referred to the refined, upper-class space of ocean liners through their highly decorative interiors and parlor spaces. A few specialized streetcars also took on the trappings of a parlor. In San Francisco, a streetcar used to transport schoolchildren on school trips was furnished with plush-upholstered wicker chairs, a carpeted floor, and window drapes (Figure 1.3). Similarly, funeral cars included a section for mourners, with upholstered furniture, carpeted floor, and drapes.

Over time streetcar design became less elaborate, as evidenced by the relatively spartan “pay-as-you-enter” streetcars (Figure 1.4). This shift toward less decoration corresponded in part to the sorting out of classes, as the rich increasingly could use personal automobiles to get around, leaving streetcars to a less affluent range of people, but was also in keeping with general stylistic changes that favored simple lines. More than the level and style of decoration changed with these new

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Figure 1.1. San Francisco cable cars, 1898–1906. In comparison with later streetcars, these cable cars, sporting elaborate ironwork, decorative clerestory roofs, and bright pant, were highly decorative. Note the extent to which the seats are open to the outside, displaying the riders to pedestrians. From the collection of Evelyn Curro; courtesy of the Cable Car Museum, San Francisco.
Figure 1.2. Ferry interiors. Ferries were decorated in a refined manner, with carpets, carved wooden details, and stained glass windows. Top image courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; bottom image courtesy of the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park.
streetcars, however. The new cars provided less service as well. Riders previously could enter the streetcar from multiple points, and a conductor would come to them for payment. Now riders paid the driver as they entered at one designated point. In addition, new seating patterns changed the experience of riders and their relationship both to other riders in the car and to the city outside. Most older cars had large portions of the vehicle open to the out-of-doors, blurring the boundary between the interior and the exterior of the car (see Figure 1.1). On many of these cars, riders faced away from one another, toward the street outside. For women passengers, this design was a boon to avoiding contact with strangers but was problematic in that it made them visible in public, a situation that was taboo. The 1911 pay-as-you-enter cars were enclosed, ridding female passengers of the burden of visibility to those on the street but also depriving male passengers of a chance to smoke on the cars, which they decried bitterly. Even more significant, the new cars replaced rows of seating with long benches facing each other across the center of the car (Figure 1.5). This design provided more space for standing passengers but made the task of avoiding both physical and eye contact with other

Figure 1.3. “San Francisco” school streetcar (first used 1904). This special streetcar was decorated in the manner of a parlor, with carpeted floors, plush seats, movable chairs, and window drapes. From Smallwood, *The White Front Cars of San Francisco*, 255.
riders more difficult. Helen Dare, a columnist for the *San Francisco Chronicle* (hereafter the *Chronicle*), described the experience of the new streetcars in 1911:

The cars are arranged, with one long seat down each side, the length of the car—for the men to sit on; and the space between the seats, the length of the car, into which the women are packed. . . . The men all sit with their legs crossed, one foot on the floor extending into the aisle. . . . Women so fill the space designed for them that there is a woman on each side of every man’s extended foot. With this convenient and methodical arrangement it is possible for the seated men passengers to easily and economically . . . get a [shoe] shine.46

The physical closeness that allowed the shoes of seated passengers to rub against the legs of standing passengers made no allowances for women to maintain physical reserve on streetcars, especially if men took all the seats, as Dare claimed. The shift to this design suggests that the concern for shielding women in public, through such mechanisms as ‘shoppers’ special’ streetcars and women’s windows at banks and other businesses, had become archaic by 1911.47

The new bench seats also made it more difficult for passengers to avoid eye contact, as they were no longer facing forward or outward, but inward, toward one another. Advertisers exploited the desire of passengers, especially women passengers, to avoid looking at the people seated across from them and used the space above the windows as a canvas (Figure 1.5). This space well above the heads of other seated passengers was easily examined without the danger of looking directly at another passenger. In these new cars, riders had to work harder at creating a social distance between themselves and other passengers. The physical intimacy of being in an enclosed space, facing other passengers, required that women work harder at seeming unapproachable.

The Built Network of Transportation in San Francisco

The lines that these streetcars traveled and the streets of San Francisco that they served were structured around the needs of efficient transportation much more than the social desires of respectable women, although the design of streetcars and improvements to streets and sidewalks responded in part to desires for clean, orderly space for polite women. Local improvement societies, particularly the Merchants’ Association of San Francisco, made many improvements to the streets, including street cleaning, street sprinkling, street paving, electric lighting, sidewalk paving, and the creation of pedestrian islands at the busiest downtown streetcar stops.48 While these made the streets more pleasant, they did not mitigate the problems of crowding on the sidewalks, especially on Market Street. The intensification of business on and around Market Street and the centrality of that street

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to the public transportation system not only led to a great number of people on the street but also increased their social variety. Although the sidewalks of the downtown were relatively wide, they were narrowed by street-widening projects aimed at improving the circulation of vehicles, which exacerbated the problem of maintaining physical as well as social distance between pedestrians.49

The structure of public transportation in San Francisco was organized primarily around the needs of male and female workers, and to a lesser extent female shoppers, who traveled to and from the downtown. The spine of San Francisco’s transportation is and was Market Street, where the city’s first streetcar ran (Figure 1.7). At the end of Market Street, streetcars and pedestrians met at the Ferry Building, from which ferries ran to points along the East, North, and South Bay, from where people could travel to the rest of the United States by train (Figure 1.8). These ferries, run by several railroad and streetcar companies, provided a means for East and North Bay residents to work in, shop in, or visit the city and for San Franciscans to frequent the East Bay and the North Bay.50 In keeping with the history of the city’s development, which expanded outward from the area near the foot of Market Street, streetcar service was densest in the central part of the city both north and south of Market Street, as can be seen in Figure 1.9, which shows the public transportation system in 1913. Parallel lines down Mission, Valencia, Howard, and Folsom Streets served to connect the Mission District, centered on

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the historic Mission Dolores, to Market Street and the downtown. The residential area north of Market was also well connected to the downtown. Several lines extended out from the core of the city to the Western Addition and then farther out to excursion destinations, including the Cliff House and Sutro Baths, Golden Gate Park, and the Chutes amusement park to the west and Ingleside Race Track to the south. As the population of the city expanded westward into the Richmond and Sunset Districts, streetcar service expanded with the population. With the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in 1915, intensive connections were also created to its site in the north of the city between the Presidio and Fort Mason.

In the nineteenth century, multiple competing companies ran public transportation in the city, using a combination of cable cars, electric cars, horsecars,
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H. J. HEINZ COMPANY
PITTSBURGH, PA.

Figure 1.5: Heinz advertisement, 1913. This advertisement, directed to grocers, shows the typical placement of streetcar advertising above the windows. As the dotted line representing the streetcar rider's gaze shows, this style of advertising helped to minimize eye contact among riders. This advertisement also indicates that Heinz saw women as regular riders of streetcars. From The Modern Grocer, May 3, 1913: 8.
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and steam railway. Some lines even combined multiple technologies, such as the Sutter Street Line, which in 1897 began as a horsecar from the ferries to Sutter and Sansome and continued from there as a cable car on Sutter. Consolidation of companies in 1893 and 1902 left the United Railroads of San Francisco controlling 229 miles of track, with only three small competitors remaining. These consolidations did not strongly affect the location of routes, only the ability to transfer easily between them. Not until 1944, under enormous competition from automobiles, were competing streetcar and bus lines combined into one municipal system.

Experiencing the Streets and Streetcars of San Francisco

For women shoppers who wanted to go downtown, the streetcars were ideal; for women visiting or working across town, however, they were often problematic.
Figure 1.8. Ferry Building, 1915. The Ferry Building, built in 1898, sits at the end of Market Street. On the plaza in front of it was a large streetcar turnaround, where ferry riders from across the bay made connections to city transportation. Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

The web of connections created by the streetcar systems of San Francisco tied residential neighborhoods to Market Street and the downtown but only rarely connected neighborhoods without going by way of Market Street. This was a built landscape based on the idea that streetcars were used primarily to travel from home to work or to go shopping. In addition to the problem of having to go to Market Street en route to another neighborhood, a crosstown trip before the extensive consolidation of 1902 often required taking streetcars run by different companies, and thus paying a fare twice. The process of taking multiple streetcars and transferring from one to the next also required women to stand around on the sidewalk, of necessity breaking the etiquette rules that women should not loiter on the streets.

Streetcars, ferries, and other forms of public transportation were open to and used by men and women of all classes and races. Very few people had private carriages or automobiles that they used on a regular basis, and although hired vehicles...
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Figure 1.8. Public transportation system, 1913. Several lines crisscrossed the downtown and connected it to areas to the north and west, while other lines connected the industrial area south of Market Street and the Mission District. As the city grew, service expanded, with new lines extending into the Richmond and Sunset Districts, north and south of Golden Gate Park. Areas that had been served for some time, such as the Mission District and the area north of Market Street, experienced increasing density. “Map of the City Showing Lines of the United Railways of San Francisco,” from McGraw Electric Railway Manual: The Red Book of American Electric Railway Investments (New York: McGraw Publishing Company, Inc., 1919). Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

were available, they were used only rarely. Carriages were hired for the ceremonial occasion of funerals, but Annie Haskell mentioned riding in a hack without such an occasion only once, when her estranged husband insisted on their taking one home from the park because the streetcars were “so crowded.” The much richer Mary Eugenie Pierce once mentioned taking her sister home in a taxi but otherwise took public transportation or, occasionally, was given a ride to Oakland by friends with automobiles. Streetcars transported people to work, to visit friends, to shop, to downtown amusements, and on excursions to sites such as
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Sutro Gardens and Sutro Baths, Ocean Beach, Golden Gate Park, the 1894 Midwinter Fair and the 1915 Panama–Pacific International Exposition. Streetcar fares were relatively low, five cents (about one dollar in current value), and thus affordable by a wide range of the population.57

However, women with limited means often walked when possible, rather than ride the streetcar, in order to save money. Young working women often had little money for themselves, as the money they earned usually went entirely into the family budget.58 Kathy Peiss writes of how young working women in New York would save money for movies or other luxuries by walking to and from work and pocketing their carfare. She quotes an investigator who wrote, “A carfare saved by walking to work is a carfare earned for a trip to a dance hall.”59 Although Annie Haskell had more control of her household money than the young working women studied by Peiss, she also often walked to save money. She regularly walked long distances to visit family members or to do errands downtown, even though she had easy access to several streetcar lines that served the Mission District, where she most often lived. After an outing in 1909 to see the annual police inspection and to do some shopping, for which she walked downtown and back from Twenty-first Street, a trip of nearly three miles each way, she wrote that she came home “tired and faint from hunger,” adding, “I don’t think it is a good way to exhaust one’s self to save a few nickels, but I suppose it is the only way to acquire wealth.”60 On a few other occasions, Haskell compromised, saving just one nickel by walking one direction and riding back.61 At several times in her life, Haskell did not have enough disposable income to take streetcars. Sometimes she walked, but on other occasions the lack of a nickel for carfare meant forgoing activities, as on April 17, 1897, when she wrote in her diary: “The Women’s Congress begins next Sunday and even if I were willing to go with shabby gloves and a shocking bad hat and the same dress I have worn for two years, and go without lunch and all that, still I can’t go for lack of carfare!”62 That same year, she also complained of missing celebrations such as Memorial Day and the Fourth of July because she couldn’t afford carfare.63

When taking streetcars, frugality could also make for a longer and more complicated ride. Annie Haskell mentions taking a circuitous route to “save two carfares” by not transferring between different companies.64 Taking the streetcars to get across town could also be onerous if one’s route did not center on Market Street. Haskell regularly complained of the wait and unpleasantness of transferring from one line to another, writing one day in 1916 that she “took five cars and had to wait for every one.”65 Transfers were also an issue; she complained that it was difficult to visit her sister Kate: “It takes quite a little strength and time to walk, and it is too short to ride considering the transfer, and extra distance to walk.”66 These long rides were presumably made even more uncomfortable by the lack of

http://site.ebrary.com/lib/masaryk/docPrint.action?encrypted=d1ab1d1...
public restroom facilities in San Francisco. While after 1903 women and men could avail themselves of San Francisco's only public restrooms at Union Square, and women who felt comfortable going into more elite spaces could also use toilets in downtown hotels and department stores, when they traveled beyond the downtown women had no bathroom facilities available to them.\(^7\)

Although men and women from all walks of life took streetcars, the experience of the built landscape of streetcars varied depending on the rider's means. For men and women with money, streetcars could be taken without regard for cost; for poorer people, streetcars were still accessible, but the decision to take one was not automatic, and complicated, time-consuming trips that might be more easily taken by automobile or a more direct, but also more expensive, route made the experience of the streetcar somewhat less pleasant. In addition, the actual streetcars experienced by men and women of different stations varied depending on the lines they rode. Lines south of Market Street, which served a more working-class population, regularly had older and less well-appointed cars assigned to them, while the newest and most luxurious cars were assigned to lines serving the financial district, Nob Hill, and other wealthy neighborhoods.\(^8\)

Crowding was also a problem on the more heavily used working-class lines. Haskell often complained about having to stand on the streetcars, as in this entry from 1907: "We took a car for Roth's. Stood up all the way too. As they were all upside down we did not want to stay long. And again waited long for a car, two did not stop at all, & we stood up all the way home again. I shall be glad to get away from the street cars if nothing else. The service is worse than diabolic."\(^9\)

Ferries also provided convenient and inexpensive (usually a nickel) transportation for riders of all class positions.\(^10\) Unlike streetcars, which could be circumvented by walking or riding in a private or hired vehicle, ferries were the only reasonable option for going to or from San Francisco from the north and east in the era before the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge to the North Bay in 1937 and the Bay Bridge to Oakland in 1939. Ferries, however, were more commodious than streetcars and provided a range of other services, including restaurants and newsstands. In addition, on the ferries, as in the Ferry Building, some separate spaces were provided for women in the form of a women's parlor (on the ferries) and a women's waiting room (in the Ferry Building). These spaces provided polite, middle-class space for travelers on their relatively brief trip across the bay and their even briefer stay in the Ferry Building.\(^11\) The experience of riding a ferry could be ordinary and unremarkable for upper-middle-class riders like Mary Pierce, who took one several times a week to visit San Francisco, or for regular commuters. For others, like Annie Haskell, the trip could provoke a dream of ship travel and an opportunity to "enjoy the water and the ships" and how "the sun glittered on the waves."\(^12\) For elite women, the comfort of the ferry ride was taken
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for granted; for less affluent women ordinarily frustrated by a streetcar system that served them poorly, the ferry was a respite as well as a glance at the luxuries of a life they could not afford to live.

Negotiating the Streets

Women in San Francisco walked the streets and took public transportation on a daily basis to go visiting, shopping, or to work. This shaped the experienced landscape of these public spaces, making men increasingly accustomed to women’s presence in public. Changes in the built landscape of sidewalks and streetcars by the 1910s reflected the normality of women’s use of them, as narrower, more crowded sidewalks and packed streetcars with lengthwise benches made it increasingly difficult for women to maintain a physical and social distance from those around them. As middle-class women walked the streets of the city and increasingly rode the streetcars at the same hours as men, they also became freer in their use of the streets, dressing and speaking more loudly, walking without an escort, and treating the streets as a space of sociability as well as transportation, following the lead of working-class women and shifting the norms of appropriate behavior. The imagined landscape shifted to include women of all classes as appropriate inhabitants of public space. Norms of behavior toward women also shifted; they were treated with less deference now that they had become more common figures on the streets and streetcars and working in shops and offices for men.

Women shared many of the same streets and streetcars, where their gender, not their class, was central to how they were treated. However, class affected how women were able to negotiate these spaces and their inconveniences. Elite women were able to use their financial power to avoid some of the pitfalls of the crowded transportation landscape, often taking private automobiles rather than streetcars and thereby also avoiding some of the most crowded streets. When they did take public transportation, they rode on the lines with the most luxurious cars, as well as on the well-appointed ferries, where they could travel in the women’s parlor. Their trips could be planned solely on the basis of convenience; they could avoid the circuitous routes and multiple transfers that plagued the travels of women who needed to avoid the double fare involved in switching from one streetcar company to another. Middle-class women without private automobiles and poorer women who sometimes could not afford even a nickel for carfare were less lucky; they could not avoid standing on crowded cars or waiting on the street, potential victims of weather and of impolite men. In the next chapter I will delve more fully into how class mediated women’s gendered experiences of San Francisco, by focusing on the landscapes of shopping.