

THESIS

THE “HYBRID HERO” IN WESTERN DIME NOVELS:  
AN ANALYSIS OF WOMEN’S GENDER PERFORMANCE, DRESS, AND IDENTITY IN  
THE DEADWOOD DICK SERIES.

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## ABSTRACT

### THE “HYBRID HERO” IN WESTERN DIME NOVELS: AN ANALYSIS OF WOMEN’S GENDER PERFORMANCE, DRESS, AND IDENTITY IN THE DEADWOOD DICK SERIES

As rapid urbanization and growth in the 19th century pushed families westward, men and women often found themselves sharing in domestic and work-related activities. In turn, these changes in gender roles brought about attendant changes in norms for gendered dress behaviors, particularly for women. One valuable window into the lives of 19th century Americans can be found in the American dime novel. Though they are fictionalized accounts of western characters’ exploits, dime novels are grounded in some historical fact, and thus, they can provide rich understanding of frontier life. Thus, this research was undertaken to gain an understanding of dime novels’ reflection of 19th century American society, including women’s negotiation of frontier life through the manipulation of gender, dress, and appearance. More specifically, the purpose of this research was to explore how dress – including cross-dressing and androgynous dress – is used by dime novel authors to construct meanings about gender and identity. The research was informed by the works of Judith Butler and Erving Goffman on performativity and by reflection theory, which are useful for understanding the complex relationships between society and literature.

Five western dime novels from the Deadwood Dick series, authored by Edward Wheeler between 1877 and 1885, were selected for analysis. Data were collected by extracting all references to women’s appearances, including dress and the situated body, within the texts of the selected novels. Data were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach to narrative inquiry. Analyses revealed the importance of dress and gender performance as a means of situating

female characters in their geographic and bodily spaces and places on the frontier. Whether female characters used traditional feminine dress, androgynous dress, or cross-dressing, there was evidence of shifting gender norms and gendered dress behaviors throughout the series.

The majority of female characters in the *Deadwood Dick* series wore traditional feminine dress and performed in conventional ways, reinforcing traditional gender binaries. Consistent with the Cult of True Womanhood, the virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity were embodied in these performances. However, there were instances in which female characters were forced to act outside the private sphere and to alter their dress and gender performances. The duality of characters' gendered role behaviors in these situations supports Cogan's (1989) notion of Real Womanhood, which provides an expanded view of women's roles.

The female protagonist of the series, Calamity Jane, adopted androgynous dress as a means by which to navigate and participate in the male-dominated public sphere with ease, confidence and power. Despite receiving negative reviews of her androgynous dress, Calamity made no alterations to her dress or performance, allowing her to challenge traditional gender binaries, to gain empowerment, and to maintain a nontraditional gender identity. As the series progressed and the 19th century came to close, issues of androgynous dress became less of a focal point in the series, revealing perhaps that nontraditional gender performances became more acceptable.

Female characters utilized cross-dressing as a means of navigating temporary changes in space and place, such as westward movement, and for participating in the public sphere. Two uses of cross-dressing were discovered: cross-dressing for disguise and cross-dressing for survival. Cross-dressing for disguise was typically undertaken for purposes of rescuing others and solving wrong-doings, whereas cross-dressing for survival was enacted for purposes of

escaping a male character. Although cross-dressing for purposes of disguise was presented as a more acceptable form of cross-dressing, for the most part, characters who cross-dressed were able to gain empowerment through their performances.

Findings provide insight into ways in which westering and pioneer women, both fictional and real, utilized appearance and gender performance to navigate and negotiate a multiplicity of geographic and bodily locations. Androgynous dress and cross-dressing allowed female characters to be “hybrid heroes” in that they participated in different plots by creating multiple identities through changes in appearance (Jones, 1978). The findings provide further knowledge about changing gender performances in the 19th century and are consistent with previous work about real-life pioneers, thus supporting reflection theory.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Background**

During the nineteenth century, as American society became more industrialized, cities along the east coast, such as New York and Boston, grew exponentially (Denning, 1998). The influx of immigrants and others to the cities during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries propagated the need for expansion and more space. Thus, men and women crowded out by the growing city population headed west towards the “continually advancing frontier line” (Turner, 1920, p. 2) in search of a place where they could make a new home and escape “the economic, geographical, and social confines of civilization” (Brown, 1997, p. 4).

As rapid urbanization and growth pushed families westward to seek new opportunities, men and women often found themselves sharing in domestic and work-related activities. In order to survive the journey west and life on the frontier, men and women were forced to assume nontraditional gender roles. Men often took part in traditionally feminine duties such as cooking and cleaning, while women took on masculine duties such as farming, working outdoors, and tending animals and livestock (Degler, 1992; Helvenston, 1986; Jeffrey, 1998; Schlissel, 1992). In turn, changes in gender roles and norms incited by westward movement brought about attendant changes in norms for gendered dress behaviors, particularly for women. Although many women continued to wear traditional feminine dress, they often had to make adaptations to some of the more cumbersome and impractical components of feminine dress in order to perform their new roles and duties with more ease. On the other hand, many women incorporated components of traditional masculine dress into their own wardrobes to create androgynous appearances. In other cases, women engaged in “cross-dressing,” adopting completely masculine dress. Androgynous dress and cross-dressing became common among frontier women

for several reasons: to accommodate the physical lifestyle of the frontier, to negotiate the hegemonic power relationships between men and women on the frontier, to participate in male-dominated roles, and to assert a measure of independence from the rigid norms of nineteenth century society.

One important window into the lives of nineteenth century Americans – including shifts in norms for gendered role behaviors such as dress – can be found in the American dime novel. Although works of fiction, many scholars consider dime novels to be important primary sources of information about nineteenth century American society, pioneer and western life, and working-class culture (Brown, 1997; Denning, 1998; Jones, 1978; O'Brien, 1922; Smith, 1978). In particular, dime novels have been said to aptly reflect the national character and social struggles of nineteenth century America:

[Dime novels are] literally saturated with the pioneer spirit of America. [The dime novel collection] portrays the struggles, exploits, trials, dangers, feats, hardships, and daily lives of the American pioneers.... It is a literature intensely nationalistic and patriotic in character; obviously designed to stimulate adventure, self-reliance and achievement; to exalt the feats of the pioneer men and women who settled the country; and to recite the conditions under which those early figures lived and did their work. (O'Brien, 1922, p. 3)

Because dime novels were generally read by, and written for the working class, the content and the themes present were those that were easily identifiable and relatable to workers (Brown, 1997; Denning, 1998). Themes of perseverance, hard work, morality, loyalty, strength, adventure, and self-reliance were common throughout all dime novel genres, including Western, detective, sport, and working class novels. The ability of dime novel authors to create characters who related to the appearance, manners, and attitudes of the “unknown public...the million,” although performing heroic or dangerous tasks in various settings, was integral in creating such a large and devoted readership (Brown, 1997; Denning, 1998).

Dime novels also have been said to “present a more accurate and vivid picture of the appearance, manner, speech, habits and methods of the pioneer western characters than do the more formal historians” (O’Brien, 1922, p. 3). Although it should be acknowledged that there were some larger-than-life western females such as Martha Cannary, otherwise known as Calamity Jane, dime novels often sensationalized historical fact for the purposes of entertainment and selling books (Cox, 2000). Though grounded in some reality and historical fact, it is important to remember that dime novels provide an author’s imagined and fictionalized vision of western characters and their exploits. With this in mind, the examination of dime novels will provide a valuable perspective from which to understand changing nineteenth century American society and westward expansion. Additionally, dime novels will be a useful tool in gaining a rich understanding of the conditions in which pioneer women worked and negotiated their appearances, genders, and identities through the use of androgynous dress and cross-dressing.

### **Purpose**

The research examined how the fictional world of western dime novels represent and create western heroines based on historical truth, and to what degree the two worlds are reflective of each other. Further, this research explored a selection of dime novels for their use of androgynous dress and cross-dressing among female characters as a means of creating new identities and spaces in which to negotiate the demands of life on the western frontier. As such, the purpose of this research was to analyze selected dime novels from the Deadwood Dick series to gain an understanding of dime novels’ reflection of nineteenth century American society, including women’s relocation to the West, women’s cross-dressing and use of androgynous dress, and women’s negotiation of frontier life through the manipulation of gender, dress, and appearance. Given the focus of this work upon dime novels as a window into the lives of



frontier women, only those novels that feature Calamity Jane, the series' main female character, were analyzed. To inform the analysis, three theoretical frameworks were utilized: reflection theory, performativity, and ecology of the self.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions were used to guide the present research project:

1. What roles do female characters play in the Deadwood Dick series?
2. How do dime novel authors use dress and appearance to describe female characters?
3. How is gender performed in the Deadwood Dick series?
4. How is androgynous dress and cross-dressing used by female characters to perform gender in the Deadwood Dick series?
5. How does dress create a sense of identity and place for female characters?
6. How do dime novels from the Deadwood Dick series reflect 19<sup>th</sup> century American values and social concerns?

### **Limitations**

Due to the breadth of dime novels available, including story papers, pamphlet novels, and cheap libraries, the researcher had to identify a rather small selection of dime novels based on format, genre, and series. A sample of five western pamphlet dime novels from the Deadwood Dick series was selected for analysis. Further, the sample was further narrowed down to include those that featured a recurring major female character. The sample size and scope are not representative of all western dime novels or other genres of dime novels.

### **Assumptions**

The author assumes that works of fiction such as dime novels may reflect, to an extent, the values, mores, and norms of the time period they were created in. Therefore, it was assumed

that dime novels reflect, to an extent, nineteenth century American society. Additionally, descriptions of dress and appearance in the dime novel selection were assumed to be accurate and representative of nineteenth century norms.

### **Definitions**

**Androgynous:** an attempt to neutralize gender differences by “unit[ing] male and female” in one body (Arnold, 2001, p.122).

**Appearance:** includes aspects of the body that can be perceived by the human senses; comprises dress, the situated body, and its attributes (e.g., age, health, skin, color, stature, mood, etc.) (Lillethun, 2007).

**Cross-dressing:** the adoption of dress and appearance by a gender opposite than that which society deems socially acceptable (Arnold, 2001; Butler, 1990).

**Dress:** any type of body modification or body supplement, such as garments, accessories, jewelry, hair styles, makeup, and piercings (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992).

**Dime novel:** a wide range of commercial, mass-produced popular fiction narratives in the form of story papers, pamphlet novels (the most common form), and the cheap library (a series of pamphlet novels in one book) published between the 1840s and 1890s (Brown, 1997; Denning, 1998, O’Brien, 1922). Pocket-sized books about a hundred pages in length featuring woodcut illustrations on the covers, and were sold for anywhere from five to twenty-five cents (Denning, 1998).

**Fashion:** “a form of human behavior and product of human behavior, which is widely accepted for a limited time and is replaceable by another fashion that is an acceptable substitute” (Roach & Musa, 1980, p. 19).

**Frontier:** characterized by movement from East to West across America, predominately in the trans-Mississippi West (Helvenston, 1990; Jeffrey, 1998; Turner, 1920); both a place and a process that serves as “a place of cultural contact and interaction between groups” (Jeffrey, 1998, p. 6).

**Gender:** gender is not fixed, but rather is created and transformed through human interactions and as a part of social life. Humans are born with a sex, but gender is socially constructed (Butler, 1990).

**Identity:** “can include public, private, and secret selves that may have many dimensions” (e.g., cultural, ethnic, subcultural, gender, sexual, etc.) (Lillethun, 2007, p. 121). Humans have multiple identities that comprise the self; these identities are shaped and influenced by gender, dress, and appearance.

**Politics of location:** relocation and negotiation of new locations results in women experiencing these new spaces or locations differently. How individuals experience the world and who they become is shaped by the various locations, both geographic and bodily, that they find themselves in. There are a variety of spaces where women can challenge traditional gender binaries, conceptualize changes to their environments, and adapt to changing locations (Blunt & Rose, 1994; Rich, 1993; Roberson, 1998a).

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This review of literature is organized into six sections. The first five sections are devoted to an analysis of empirical findings, whereas the last section provides a review of the theoretical frameworks utilized in the research. The first section provides background information on nineteenth century American society, including the social, political, and economic climate as well as discussion of traditional gender roles. The second section reviews previous work on gender, dress, and identity. The third section discusses issues related to western relocation and movement, and the fourth section examines the evolution of fashion on the frontier. The dime novel as a reflection of national character is discussed in the fifth section. The theoretical frameworks reviewed in the last section include reflection theory, performativity, and ecology of the self. The review concludes with a summary of existing work.

### **Nineteenth Century American Society**

The advent of the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century brought about substantial changes to the social, political, and economic climate of American society. As industries grew overnight, so did the national wealth and independent fortunes of “a new breed of capitalists,” including railroad builders, lumber kings, meat packers, steel barons, and oil men, who came to dominate American industry and society (Jones, 1978, p. 10). Although industrialization brought with it advances in transportation, electricity, and industrial processes, for the average American citizen, it also brought a changing and sometimes uncertain future. As a result of the Industrial Revolution, local shops and industries went out of business as they were replaced by large industrialized factories, mechanization and cheap immigrant labor created job loss, and the dynamic of neighborhoods was forever changed by the influx of immigrants (Jones, 1978). In the last few decades of the nineteenth century, industrialization also resulted in the

significant increase of women and children working in industry, which coupled with the rapidly changing social, political, and economic landscape of American society, challenged traditional gender roles.

### **Changing Gender Roles**

Traditional gender roles of the nineteenth century were divided between two spheres: the domestic and the public. The domestic sphere belonged to women, who were expected to be pious, pure, submissive, and domestic beings in the comfort and refuge of their homes (Gordon, 2003; Welter, 1966). Women were expected to work in silence and to be unseen members of the home where they acted as religious and moral authorities. On the other hand, “men were the movers, the doers, the actors” who operated in the public sphere (Welter, 1966, p. 159). Male gender norms valued rank, power, and personal strength. Women’s work in the domestic sphere was for the sake of unburdening their husbands so that they could operate properly and efficiently in the public sphere as breadwinners and community leaders. However, the rapid industrialization of the latter half of the nineteenth century resulted in the blurring of traditional gender roles and norms. While industrialization and urbanization created more job opportunities for women, it also encouraged many families to move westward in search of open space and the opportunity for a life more reminiscent of pre-Industrial Revolution America (Denning, 1998; Jones, 1978). These changes served as the necessary conduit for shifts in traditional gender roles, as women and men were increasingly called upon to share in the duties of both the domestic and public spheres.

Life on the frontier demanded that men and women take on a variety of tasks and roles that were not normally acceptable in nineteenth century society. For instance, it was necessary for men and women to share in domestic and work-related activities to ensure their families’

survival and to achieve economic improvement. Often, men would perform duties traditionally ascribed to women, such as cooking, cleaning, and tending to the children. In addition to performing domestic duties, women were also called upon to take part in farming, take care of animals and livestock, fight floods and fires, work outdoors, and perform physical labor (Helvenston, 1986; Jeffrey, 1998; Myres, 1982; Schlissel, 1992). The work that women took part in on the frontier allowed them “to regain some of the economic importance they had lost as a result of nineteenth-century industrialization,” which, in turn, helped to foster empowerment, self-reliance, and confidence (Helvenston, 1990, p. 150). Although the merging of male and female gender roles would normally be viewed as improper, on the frontier it was a normal occurrence that was viewed positively by most. In 1864, the editor of the *Union Sentinel* said of frontier women: “Under ordinary circumstances, this would be improper and unbecoming, but now is praiseworthy, and gives us proof of the solid and at the same time class character and good sense of American women” (in Helvenston, 1990, p. 148).

### **The Cult of True/Real Womanhood**

Barbara Welter’s (1966) cult of True Womanhood has become the lens through which many historians and scholars of nineteenth century American studies have viewed women and women’s roles in society. Through the examination of women’s magazines published between 1820 and 1860, Welter determined that “woman, in the cult of True Womanhood...was the hostage in the home” (p. 151). The attributes of True Womanhood were determined to be piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, all of which promised happiness and power. These four virtues were best performed, practiced, and refined in woman’s “proper sphere,” the home (Welter, 1966). Whereas men were active participants in the public sphere and expected to be aggressive, strong, and independent, women were expected to be passive, submissive, silent, and

unseen participants in the private sphere. In the vein of True Womanhood, women were encouraged to create moral and social reform only within the home, to revel in the uplifting nature of housework, and to adopt an almost childlike and dependent demeanor (Welter, 1966). Although women's magazines were rampant with the rhetoric of True Womanhood, there were "forces at work in the nineteenth century which impelled woman herself to change, to play a more active role in society" (Welter, 1966, p. 173). These forces included industrialism, social reform, the Civil War, and westward migration. Faced with a rapidly changing society and situations that called for action outside the home, the ideal of True Womanhood was no longer practical or attainable.

Frances Cogan (1989) offers an alternative view to Welter's True Womanhood, the Ideal of the Real Woman or Real Womanhood, which provides a different lens through which to view the lives of nineteenth century American women. Real Womanhood claims that there is a "unique sphere of action and duty" that demands a real woman "not to sacrifice herself, but to survive" (pp. 4-5). The Ideal of Real Womanhood asserts that women's spheres were broader than the private, domestic spheres dictated by the Cult of True Womanhood. Real Womanhood contends that the advice columns and women's magazines so notorious for advocating True Womanhood also can be interpreted as encouraging strength, independence, intelligence, and survival among women, both inside and outside the home:

As a result of such didactic fiction and advice texts, during a forty-year period in the mid-nineteenth century, ideals of fragility clashed with ideals of competence, pious self-sacrifice with survival, and the popular middle-class reader was left with two countering class images of women's nature, capabilities, and goals to study and possibly emulate. (Cogan, 1989, p. 18)

Whereas much of the rhetoric in women's magazines encouraged piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, the reality was much different for many women, especially

those of the working-class. According to Cogan and other scholars, marginalized groups have been forgotten and overlooked, resulting in generalizations applicable almost solely to upper- and middle-class white men and women (Armitage, 2007; Castaneda, 1992; Dornan & Kleinberg, 2007; Jeffrey, 1998; Myres, 1982). Upper- and middle-class women's realities were much different than those of working-class women who were forced by necessity to work outside the home; therefore, Cogan's ideal of Real Womanhood is more encompassing of the daily lives and struggles of women. While many women worked very hard at attaining the ideal of True Womanhood, there also were many women who worked both within the home and outside of the home, whether out of economic, religious, or political necessity, or for the sake of westward movement and the settlement of new frontiers (Cogan, 1989; Jeffrey, 1998; Myres, 1982).

### **Western Relocation and Movement**

Colonization, immigration, and westward movement are central foundations of American history, which, according to George Pierson (1970), served to shape a national character and identity that were forged in large part by the "M-factor": movement, migration, and mobility. Central to Pierson's thesis is the idea that American history and character have been built upon a yearning for change that spurred the movement, migration, and mobility of the nation's people, which, in turn, inspired within them the capacity to readily adapt to ever-changing circumstances. Chevalier's (1839) observation that pioneering Americans were continuously moving and traveling in search of the next great opportunity echoes Pierson's propositions about the centrality of change and migration in the shaping of early America. Thus, the opening of the frontier and subsequent westward movement played integral roles in the formation of the American national character, and so should be given due consideration for their importance in history.



## **The Western Frontier**

Frederick Jackson Turner's (1920) "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," originally presented in 1893, suggests that the Western frontier was essential to the development of American culture and democracy and that the "dominant individualism" typical of American character could be attributed to the country's frontier past (Turner, 1920, p. 37). Although Turner's work laid the foundation for much of modern historical study, it is important to note that his work reflects the values of the time, including those favoring the attitudes and experiences of affluent white males, and neglects those of women and minorities. However, Turner's frontier thesis provides an important look at the male perspective of westward expansion and the settlement of the frontier. Turner's writings construct the Western frontier as a "meeting point between savagery and civilization" and the settlement of that frontier as the progression of a metaphorical line that continuously advanced westward into primitive areas (p. 4). According to Turner, as the line continued moving each year into new and mostly unsettled areas, settlers were given the opportunity for a "perennial rebirth" as they colonized and asserted American values of independence, self-reliance, perseverance, and strength (Denning, 1998; Turner, 1920). Further, the notion that on one side of the line lay civilization and civilized peoples, and on the other side, savagery and barbarians, legitimated westward movement by suggesting that white men were the carriers of progress and that the indigenous people were savages who held no claim to their own lands.

Thus, with the mindset that the West was an open and largely unsettled land, Americans and immigrants headed west fueled by the desire for opportunity, adventure, and advancement. As unsettled lands and lands occupied by the Native Americans were colonized year after year by pioneers, adventurers, and men of various trades during the westward expansion of the late

nineteenth century, the formation of a national character that values self-sufficiency, individualism, independence, and democracy occurred. Although the frontier was closed by the 1890 Census, its importance in shaping American society and the American character should not be forgotten: “The stubborn American environment...did indeed furnish a new field of opportunity, a gate of escape from the bondage of the past; and freshness and confidence, and scorn of older society” (Turner, 1920, p. 38).

The convergence of Americans, immigrants, Native Americans, and other peoples on the frontier resulted in the formation of an American nationality composed of a wide range of nationalities and social classes (Chevalier, 1839; Turner, 1920). Although Turner’s work is an important and seminal one from which to view and interpret the experiences of white men on the frontier, there is a noticeable omission of the experiences of women, as well as people of different ethnicities and social classes. Until the late 1970s and 1980s, Turner’s frontier thesis was widely accepted and adopted by historians and other scholars. In response to an increasing dissatisfaction with Turner’s view of the frontier experience, Patricia Limerick (1987) introduced the “new western history,” which views the West and the frontier as both a process and a place where gender, race, and class intersect. This intersectionality of race, gender, and class on the frontier, argues Limerick, is a more comprehensive and accurate view of the experiences of those involved in westward movement. The purpose of new western history is to look at western history “no longer [as] the study of the triumphant American pioneer...but of a myriad of issues, events, and peoples” (Anderson & Chamberlain, 2008, p. 4). Because I am examining both men’s and women’s experiences on the frontier, this work was conducted in the spirit of new western history, while still acknowledging the importance of Turner’s contribution to understanding westward movement and the American pioneer.

## **The Politics of Location/Relocation**

As women relocate and are forced to renegotiate their geographic spaces, they experience these new spaces or locations differently. In large part, women's experiences of relocation are influenced by class, race, language, personality, and gender, as well as the extent to which they are involved in the decision to relocate (Blunt & Rose, 1994; Roberson, 1998a). Rich (1993) makes the argument that how individuals experience the world and who they become is fashioned by the various locations, both geographic and bodily, that they find themselves in. Blunt and Rose (1994) further propose that locations and spaces are "fragmented, multidimensional, contradictory, and provisional," creating a unique dynamic in which there are a multiplicity of spaces where women can challenge traditional gender binaries, conceptualize changes to their environments, and adapt to changing locations (p. 7). Stemming from Rich's "politics of location," Roberson (1998a) posits that the reconfiguration and negotiation of new geographic locations experienced by women on the frontier was rather a "politics of relocation," which describes the unstable and kinetic reality of the pressures, challenges, imbalance, and disorientation experienced by women on the move. The conflict experienced by pioneer women attempting to negotiate and renegotiate their changing physical, bodily, and intellectual locations was frightening while also exhilarating and liberating, providing a multifaceted and complex understanding of westering women's experiences.

Scholars of frontier studies also note that there are tangible relationships between geographic relocation/movement and women's sense of self that are constantly being negotiated and changing (Blunt & Rose, 1994; Chevalier, 1969; Kolodny, 1984; Roberson, 1998a, 1998b). Women relocating to the West, and other frontiers, had to negotiate a "complex and shifting matrix of power relations" within their domestic, public, and personal spheres by constantly

adapting their identities and spaces; this was achieved through changes in appearance, dress, manners, domestic and social duties, and gender roles (Blunt & Rose, 1994, p. 14). Gender, sexuality, appearance, and dress are all spaces or locations in which women can redefine and negotiate their sense of self, as well as to assist with settling into new geographic locations.

### **Gender, Identity, and Dress on the Frontier**

To exert control over social interactions and to define the situation for the self and for others, people may alter their actions, manipulate their environments, and/or adjust their appearances (Charon, 1985; Stone, 1995). It is important for situations to be defined – be it through actions, dress, or gender performances – so that observers can interpret self-presentations and interactions and plan their behaviors, accordingly. On the American frontier, gender, identity, and dress interacted together to form a variety of appearances that were crucial in assisting pioneers in navigating and negotiating social interactions in new and different environments.

Feminist scholars have suggested that although humans are born with a sex, gender is socially constructed (Butler, 1990; Lorber, 1994). That is, gender is created and transformed through human interactions and as a part of social life. In this vein, Butler (1990) proposes that gender is unstable and can be manipulated in various ways to create different performative identities. Thus, men and women can “enact the behavior of the other” through the manipulation of acts, gestures, appearance, and dress (Lorber, 1994, p. 6). Androgyny and cross-dressing are two types of performance through which gender can be manipulated (Butler, 1990). Arnold (2001) conceptualizes androgyny as an attempt to neutralize gender differences by “unit[ing] male and female” in one body (p.122). On the other hand, cross-dressing involves the adoption of dress and appearance by a gender opposite than that which society deems socially acceptable

(Arnold, 2001; Butler, 1990). For the purposes of this work, dress will be defined as any type of body modification or body supplement, including garments, accessories, jewelry, hairstyles, makeup, and piercings (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). Thus, androgynous dress refer to any type of body modification or body supplement that unites male and female in an attempt to neutralize gender differences, whereas cross-dressing refers to body modifications or supplements used to adopt a different gender (Arnold, 2001; Butler, 1990; Krishnaraj, 1996; Lorber, 1994; Michaelson & Aaland, 1976; Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992).

Appearance comprises dress, the situated body, and its attributes (e.g., age, health, skin, color, stature, mood, etc.); further, appearance includes aspects of the body that can be perceived by the human senses (e.g., sight, smell, touch, hearing, and taste) (Lillethun, 2007). The interaction between gender, dress, and appearance helps to establish one's identity. Appearance management occurs daily during social contexts so as to represent various identities and to manage others' reactions to and perceptions of one's representation of self. During social transactions, programs (evaluations about the wearer by wearer) and reviews (evaluations about the wearer by others) can "coincide" or clash, leading to either the validation of self or to the modification and redefinition of self (Stone, 1995). Thus, the negotiation of gender, dress, and appearance are crucial in obtaining the "validating responses essential to the establishment of our self" (Stone, 1995, p. 230).

Prior examinations of frontier fashion have explored how women and men have utilized dress and appearance to maintain traditional gender roles, the struggle between maintaining a fashionable appearance and wearing work/environment appropriate dress, and the use of androgynous dress by men and women. Roach and Musa's (1980) definition of fashion is useful for understanding the importance of fashion on the frontier: "a form of human behavior and

product of human behavior, which is widely accepted for a limited time and is replaceable by another fashion that is an acceptable substitute” (p. 19). Thus, frontier fashion should be viewed as not only a tangible product, but also as a process (Helvenston, 1986).

### **Maintenance of Traditionally Feminine Dress**

For women on the frontier, fashion often served a social function, useful in establishing groups in which frontier women could interact, share fashion advice, and hold onto vestiges of their femininity. Despite the male-dominated atmosphere of the western frontier, there is evidence of the persistence of the fashion process in these new and developing frontier societies (Helvenston, 1986, 1990). The small, isolated frontier communities acted as “microcosms” where the fashion process differed from one community to another; the fashion process in these communities was dependent in large part on the availability and prevalence of fashion news communication, as well as the availability of transportation routes. Some communities were more isolated from transportation routes than were others, thus affecting the amount and frequency of communication regarding fashion. To stay abreast of the latest fashion news and styles, frontier women relied on newspapers, fashion periodicals (e.g., *Godey’s Ladies Book*, *Peterson’s Magazine*, and *Harper’s Bazaar*), public reading rooms, face-to-face contact, newcomers to the community, and letters and hometown newspapers sent by relatives (Helvenston, 1990). These sources of fashion communication provided frontier women with the means with which to create networks amongst themselves for discussing fashion and upholding feminine ideals.

Although, according to the social conventions of the time, women were supposed to “act as neat and proper ornaments for [their] households,” the rigors of frontier life often required women to take on work and roles not befitting of traditional female gender norms (Helvenston,

1986, p. 35). As traditional masculine and feminine spheres merged, women's sense of their femininity was challenged, often leading them to value symbols of femininity. Fashionable dress was representative of the female sphere, and thus many women fought "to maintain these vestiges of a familiar environment once they moved to the frontier" (Helvenston, 1990, p. 143). Despite the uncomfortable, impractical, and sometimes dangerous nature of proper female dress on the frontier, many women insisted on preserving their feminine dress and appearance as a means of upholding and asserting their femininity in male-dominated contexts.

### **Fashion versus Utility**

Although many women sought to maintain vestiges of traditional feminine dress on the frontier, others understood the impracticality of doing so, and so adopted dress more suited to the rigors of frontier life. Helvenston (1986) notes that the demands of frontier life "necessitated a more assertive and instrumental role for women" (p. 36). These new roles also necessitated the adoption of different dress that allowed for more mobility and comfort. Hoop skirts, corsets, tight bodices, voluminous skirts, and excessive trimmings were no longer practical (Helvenston, 1990; Walker, 1998).

The struggle over fashion versus utility was common among frontier women. For many women, fashionable dress was a way to negotiate a sense of place and of self on the frontier; for other women, utility dress gave them the comfort and freedom that suited their new roles, but which were not socially acceptable in eastern society. Thus, the types of changes adopted in dress to accommodate the physical pioneering lifestyle varied among frontier women. Many women chose to maintain a feminine appearance, albeit a much more simplified and practical version, whereas others adopted more radical fashions, such as the Bloomer dress and the Mother Hubbard dress. The Bloomer dress, the source of much controversy at the time of its inception

in the 1850s, featured a knee-length skirt over loose pants, which allowed women increased mobility and decreased risk of catching their skirts in cooking fires (Helvenston, 1986; Walker, 1998). The Mother Hubbard dress, introduced in the 1870s, was a versatile, loose, and comfortable dress that also allowed for increased mobility and comfort (Helvenston, 1986). Although the Bloomer dress and the Mother Hubbard dress were controversial variations from women's fashion, they were still dresses. Some pioneering women violated gender role expectations for dress in an even more ostentatious manner by dressing in men's clothing and adopting a male appearance (Helvenston, 1990; Walker, 1998). Many did so for physical comfort, social convenience, and personal safety, as well as to participate in male-dominated roles. Whether women adopted simplified female dress, radical women's fashions of the time, or men's dress, they did so because they "acknowledged that survival had become more important than pride or appearance" (Walker, 1998, p. 17).

### **Androgynous Dress and Cross-Dressing on the Frontier**

The nineteenth century ideas of female "delicacy, purity, and uselessness," (Walker, 1998, p. 17) as well as the idea of women as "neat and proper ornaments" had no place on the frontier (Helvenston, 1986, p. 35). Whereas some women adopted more simplified versions of traditional female dress, many other women adopted androgynous dress as a means of negotiating changing gender roles and performing tasks necessary for survival on the frontier. Roberson's research on pioneer women's diaries revealed that some women liked their androgynous "Western appearance[s]" that included pieces of masculine dress; Mary Alice Shutes wrote in her journal, "I am dressed like Charles and straddle my horse" (in Roberson, 1998b, p. 230). For many women, not having to follow fashion gave them a sense of relief and liberation (Helvenston, 1990). As women took on these new identities and learned different



ways to consider themselves, feelings of self-sufficiency and empowerment became commonplace (Blunt & Rose, 1994; Roberson, 1998b). Thus, androgynous dress and appearance and cross-dressing became forms of “hybridity” for negotiating the hegemonic power relationships between men and women on the frontier (Blunt & Rose, 1994, p. 17).

## **Nineteenth Century Literature as a Reflection of National Character**

### **The Dime Novel in American Culture**

The term dime novel encompasses a wide range of commercial, mass-produced popular fiction narratives in the form of story papers, pamphlet novels (the most common form), and the cheap library (a series of pamphlet novels in one book) published between the 1840s and 1890s (Brown, 1997; Denning, 1998, O’Brien, 1922). The pamphlet novel will be examined for the purposes of this research; as such, further use of the term dime novel will refer to pamphlet novels, specifically. Dime novels were most often pocket-sized books about a hundred pages in length featuring woodcut illustrations on the covers, and were sold for anywhere from five to twenty-five cents (Brown, 1997; Denning, 1998). The small size of the dime novels was useful for the typical readers, including school children, Civil War soldiers, male and female factory workers, and other laborers, who needed to be able to easily conceal or store the novels when they were not reading them. Most often, dime novels were published in series (e.g. *Beadle’s Half-Dime Library*, *The Deadwood Dick Library*, *Frank Starr’s American Novels*) that featured specific characters (e.g. Deadwood Dick, Calamity Jane, Frank Starr) and genres (e.g. Western, detective, sports). Due to industrialization and improved printing methods, dime novels were able to be published on a monthly basis so that readers had a new adventure in the next installment of their favorite series to look forward to each month (Denning, 1998).

As a body of literature, the dime novel often was regarded as cheap, sensationalist popular fiction that was responsible for distracting children, increasing crime, and “contaminating the morals of the working class,” (Brown, 1997, p. 3) as well as being an inferior and distasteful form of literature (Denning, 1998). On the other hand, dime novels evoke images of boys and young men reading all-American stories about slick detectives and sea-faring adventurers and wild tales of adventures on the western front (Brown, 1997; Denning, 1998; Jones, 1978). Many scholars of literature and sociology consider dime novels to be an important primary source of information about working-class culture, pioneer and western life, and nineteenth-century Americans (Brown, 1997; Denning, 1998; Jones, 1978; O’Brien, 1922). According to O’Brien, dime novels provide insight into the habits, characteristics, speech, and lives of everyday working-class people. Common throughout the large body of dime novels are themes of perseverance, hard work, morality, loyalty, strength, adventure, and self-reliance, all of which are themes inherent in the American national character (Brown, 1997; Denning, 1998; Jones, 1978).

### **The Western Dime Novel**

Many plots of the Western dime novel “express in literary form the popular belief that civilization’s contact with the wilderness would strengthen the national character, redeem society, and assure the eventual realization of the utopian ideal” (Jones, 1978, p. 41). As mid-nineteenth century America was undergoing labor strife, economic worries, and increased industrialization, “the dime novel Western functioned increasingly as a vehicle for social criticism and spiritual reaffirmation” (Jones, 1978, p. 56). The plots and characters of the dime novels served to represent the morals and ideals that American society valued in the face of adversity, but which were not necessarily upheld in reality. The frontier setting of Western dime

novels was regarded as a “potential paradise,” which continued moving further and further west as civilization continued to encroach on the closing frontier (Jones, 1978; Turner, 1920). During a time of “increasing class stratification and declining social mobility,” the Western character/hero represented the idea that social advancement and new opportunities were available and attainable for all (Jones, 1978, p. 46).

Western dime novelists often concentrated their stories on one protagonist who participated in multiple plots by creating multiple identities, “simply by changing his clothes” (Jones, 1978, p. 42). Jones refers to this character as the “hybrid hero,” which provides an interesting lens through which to examine Western dime novel characters, both male and female. The use of androgynous dress and cross-dressing by these “hybrid heroes” assists with their negotiation of power relationships between men and women on the frontier. Scholars of dime novels note that male characters often employ cross-dressing in order to pass as a woman when in need of escaping an unfavorable situation (e.g. surrounded by enemies in a saloon or other establishment). In addition, male characters may change their clothes in order to switch between the role of the adventurer and the role of the lover (Brown, 1997; Denning, 1998; Jones, 1978). On the other hand, female protagonists, such as Calamity Jane, often adopted androgynous dress and/or cross-dressing to pass as a male, to neutralize gender differences, to perform traditionally masculine roles more efficiently and effectively, and to switch between various identities (e.g. adventurer/heroine versus mother/wife) (Brown, 1997; Jones, 1978). Both male and female characters in dime novels appear to utilize androgynous dress and cross-dressing as a means of achieving “hybridity” (Blunt & Rose, 1994) in space and place, and of creating the “hybrid hero” identity (Jones, 1978).

## **Working-Class Culture in Dime Novels**

The capitalization of publishers, such as Beadle and Adams, on the revolution in publishing technology and the growing demand for accessible literature created a “fiction factory” that changed the face of the national publishing industry by providing cheaper than ever novels at a faster than ever rate (Denning, 1998). As such, working-class individuals were able to purchase novels, a luxury previously afforded to the upper- and middle-classes (Brown, 1997; Denning, 1998). Dime novels tended to serve as an escape from everyday life for predominately working class men and women, although there was a small contingency of upper- and middle-class dime novel readers, as well. The stories, themes, and characters in dime novels reflect those of the working class: “So a history of dime novels is not simply a history of a culture industry; it also encompasses a history of their place in working class culture” (Denning, 1998, p. 26). The working class valued hard work, honesty, loyalty, and strength as well as the possibility for a better future, all of which are represented by the characters and plots of the Western dime novel.

## **Role of Women in Literature and Dime Novels**

Increasingly throughout the nineteenth century, women were becoming authors, and a significant portion of dime novel authors were women (Brown, 1997; Denning, 1998). In fact, the first dime novel, *Malaeska; The Indian Wife of the White Hunter*, was written by Ann Sophia Stephens (Brown, 1997). Stephens went on to publish several dime novels and other novels, as well as to serve as editor of many prominent magazines. Stephens is a good example of how women writers found success in this genre of literature. The protagonist of *Malaeska* is an Indian woman who has to bury her husband and father at the same time- and so must spend the story taking care of herself and journeying about as a self-sufficient Indian woman (Brown,

1997). The significant role of women in the dime novel, both as author and character, was well established from the very beginning of the dime novel genre.

In his *Dime Novel Companion*, J. Randolph Cox (2000) notes that female characters were often forced “to take [a] stand in a male profession or a male-dominated world due to adverse circumstances” in their lives (p. 286). As such, female characters had to be able to “hold [their] own” in whatever male-dominated situations they encountered, and they did (Cox, 2000, p. 286). In addition, Cox reveals that in frontier and western dime novels in particular, women adopted male dress and an androgynous appearance in order to assist in their hybrid roles. Clearly, dress plays an important role in dime novels’ portrayal of female characters immersed in male-dominated cultures and roles.

### **The Deadwood Dick Series**

Between 1877 and 1885, Edward L. Wheeler, a dime novelist, penned the Deadwood Dick series, in which he traced the adventures and exploits of Deadwood Dick, an outlaw road agent in the Black Hills of Deadwood, South Dakota. The series was examined for the purposes of this research. The dime novels were published in *Beadle’s Half-Dime Library* (1877-1885), *Beadle’s Boys Library of Sport, Story, and Adventure* (1882), *Beadle’s Pocket Library* (1884-1889), and *The Deadwood Dick Library* (1889-1900). Of the 34 dime novels included in the series, the first 24 were reprinted in *Beadle’s Pocket Library* and *The Deadwood Dick Library*; *Beadle’s Half-Dime Library* was the original publisher of the Deadwood Dick series (Cox, 2000).

The story of Deadwood Dick, also known as Edward “Ned” Harris, begins as a young man living in the East with his sister, Anita Harris. Ned and Anita were persecuted and driven out of their home by Alexander and Clarence Filmore, father and son who had a personal agenda

against Ned. Upon reaching the West in search of a new beginning, Ned became a stage driver, but soon was caught up in banditry, at which time he earned the name Deadwood Dick. He was eventually involved in an attempted hanging for his role as a bandit, but escaped death when a friend rescued him from his seemingly hopeless plight. In response to this near-death experience, Deadwood Dick remarked, “While I hung and paid my debt to nature and justice, I came back to life a free man to whom no law in the universe could molest for past offenses” (in Smith, 1978, p. 101). Although Deadwood Dick often exacts revenge and serves justice by killing those who have wronged him and society, he does show some measure of fairness, mercy, and “concern with social problems that is...unique in the dime novels” (Smith, 1978, p. 101). In several stories, Deadwood Dick “stand[s] up in defense of the weak and unprotected” (Wheeler, 1881, chapter IV). Despite his varied past, Deadwood Dick achieves fame and fortune for his exploits as a road agent and for his involvement in the mining industries of South Dakota. As a character, Deadwood Dick is a study in contrasts, embodying traits of both the traditional genteel hero and the archetypical villain (Smith, 1978). Although he is without upper-class rank, he possesses considerable skill in riding and shooting, and is often involved in romantic affairs. Deadwood Dick experiences several unsuccessful marriages and love affairs throughout the series; however, he does find lasting love and companionship with Calamity Jane.

Calamity Jane, a major recurring female character in the Deadwood Dick series, is “the feminine counterpart of Deadwood Dick” (Smith, 1978, p. 117). Similar to Deadwood Dick, as well as to other dime novel heroines, Calamity Jane was transformed from a refined character to a ruthless, gun-slinging character due to some great mysterious “wrong” in her past. Calamity Jane acts as an outlaw road agent who drinks whiskey, smokes cigars, plays cards, swears, fights, shoots, and dresses like a man (Brown, 1997; Jones, 1978; Smith, 1978). Her dress and

appearance often are described in great detail, perhaps owing to the fact that, during the nineteenth century, it was unusual for women to adopt the dress of men. While the real Calamity Jane, Martha Cannary, was a notorious cross-dressing and gun-slinging figure in the Black Hills of Deadwood, there are few other similarities between her and the fictional Calamity Jane portrayed in the series (Cox, 2000).

Throughout many of the stories, both Deadwood Dick and Calamity Jane are involved in a number of marriages and love affairs with others and with each other. At times, the two are one another's love interests, and at other times, they are enemies, but common across many of the stories is their camaraderie, affection, and respect for one another (Cox, 2000). The complex and evolving nature of the relationship between Deadwood Dick and Calamity Jane is due in part to their similar personalities and histories. Smith (1978) notes that "like much of the inner structure of the Deadwood saga, the relations between Deadwood Dick and Calamity Jane are hard to make out" (p. 117). Although plots, characters, and love interests vary from story to story and often jump around in time, Calamity Jane and Deadwood Dick remain major characters whose stories intersect in a multitude of ways.

### **Theoretical Groundings**

This analysis of selected dime novels from the Deadwood Dick series was guided by three theories: reflection theory, performativity, and ecology of the self. These theories were chosen for their usefulness in understanding the ways in which literature and society are reflective of one another, how gender is performed through the manipulation of dress and appearance, and how changing environments may impact one's sense of self. Together, reflection theory, performativity, and ecology of the self assisted in understanding how female dime novel characters used dress and appearance to create a variety of gender performances and

to what extent the female dime novel characters and their dress, appearance, and manners were reflective of changing gender roles in nineteenth century America.

### **Reflection Theory**

Previous research demonstrates that literature, in particular dime novels, often reflects social and cultural conditions of society (Albrecht, 1954; Brown, 1997; Denning, 1998; Griswold, 1981; Jones, 1978; Lowenthal, 1961; White, 1980). Reflection theory proposes that “cultural products such as literature in some way mirror the social order” (Griswold, 1981, p. 740). As such, reflection theory is useful in understanding the complex relationships between society and literature. Gyorgy Lukacs’ seminal works, *The Theory of the Novel* (1971) and *The Historical Novel* (1983), provide the foundations of reflection theory in Marxism. Lukacs argues that the use of “typical” characters in historical fiction to dramatize major social conflicts and historical events enables authors to depict social life not as fixed, but as constantly changing and open to transformation. Dime novel authors’ use of a few standard plots and character types follows Lukacs’ model for historical fiction, allowing social and cultural conditions to be more easily related to the audience (Denning, 1998; Jones, 1978; Lowenthal, 1961).

According to White (1980), literature provides unique access to social structures and history of a given society and/or time period that other cultural or linguistic artifacts cannot. Further, he notes that literature has the “power to transcend, criticize, or at least self-consciously comment on the structure of those social conditions under which literary works are produced” (White, 1980, p. 364). Thus, literary works have the ability not only to provide insight into culture and society, but also to critique and comment on the social conditions of the times. Examining dime novels through the lens of reflection theory will allow themes regarding the



social and cultural conditions of society, as well as themes about dress, appearance, gender, and identity to emerge.

### **Performativity**

Stemming from symbolic interaction theory is Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective, in which social interactions are analyzed as though a part of a theatrical performance. Goffman (1959) states that everyone plays a role and "it is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves" (p. 19). Important to the notion of performance is the personal front, which includes expressive equipment that the performer utilizes in order for the audience to identify him or her. Expressive equipment includes items of dress, gender, speech, and race to name a few. Overall, the goal of the actor's various presentations of self is to gain acceptance from the audience through the manipulation of fronts, manners, and settings (Goffman, 1959). At any given time, the actor may have multiple performances or "social selves" that change depending on the performance or social situation. Thus, a woman may adopt androgynous dress or cross-dress as a part of her front in the hopes of manipulating others' perceptions of herself.

Judith Butler's (1990) work on the performative nature of gender is useful in considering how women perform society's hegemonic, heterosexual standards of gender. According to Butler, gender performances serve to create and shape rather than to reflect individuals' identities. Men and women create and maintain gendered performances that society deems socially acceptable and appropriate through the "stylization of the body" (e.g., bodily gestures, movements, and various styles of dress) (Butler, 1990, p. 191). On the other hand, one may choose to go against society's gender norms by taking part in subversive bodily acts such as drag, cross-dressing, and androgynous dress, which allow for experimentation with a variety of

gender identities. The meanings attached to gender performances are contingent on the wearer and the audience's experiences and values. The act of cross-dressing or of putting on androgynous dress creates gender performances that stray from society's gender norms, but that also create "expand[ed] possibilities" of what it means to be a man or woman (Butler, 1990, p. 3).

### **The Ecology of the Self**

Hormuth's (1990) concept of the ecology of the self is important in understanding how women's relocation to the western frontier affected their sense of self and the ways in which women negotiated these new environments in the process of re-establishing their identities. The ecology of the self describes the "constituents of the self, namely others, environments, and things that provide, mediate, and perpetuate social experience" (Hormuth, 1990, p. 2). Within the concept of the ecology of the self, personal change and development occur through others, objects, and environments. Interactions with others provide a source of direct social experience in which one's concept of the self is reflected by the reactions of others; in other words, others provide a mirror through which to view one's self (Hormuth, 1990). Objects serve as "symbols and representations of social experiences" that assist in the maintenance of one's sense of self (Hormuth, 1990, p. 3). Environments provide the setting for social experiences and can reflect one's identity. Hormuth argues that others, objects, and environments are interdependent aspects of the self-concept that must maintain stability; otherwise, actions must be taken in order to restructure one or all of the components of the ecology the of self. Changing environments, whether externally- or self-imposed, can have a significant impact on an individual's sense of self, and so steps must be taken to become acclimated and adjusted to new environments. Westering women often ended up in the West due to the inclinations of their husbands or fathers,

but once there, women “had to improvise their lives as they lived them, to face changes in plan and expectation caused by geographic dislocation” (Roberson, 1998a, p. 4). Thus, westering women negotiated, and often renegotiated, their new environments; in addition, women had to negotiate relationships with others in these new environments, as well as the new objects required of life on the frontier.

### **Conclusions**

Women’s movement to new frontiers necessitated changes in geographic and bodily location and identity. Along with these changes came shifts in gender roles and dress norms. Frontier life demanded that women straddle the domestic and public spheres in order to survive and assert themselves in their new locations, providing many women with feelings of empowerment, strength, and self-sufficiency. Accounts of pioneer women’s experiences, as well as dime novel stories, portray the ways in which women negotiated and renegotiated these roles (Jeffrey, 1998; Myres, 1982; Schlissel, 1992).

In order to adapt to their new roles on the frontier, many women adopted masculine dress. The adoption of masculine dress by pioneer women, whether worn to create an androgynous appearance or for purposes of cross-dressing, served as expressive equipment with which women created fronts crucial in their performances within male-dominated spaces and places (Goffman, 1959). The Western dime novel, as an important primary source, provides a rich sample of nineteenth century American culture and dress norms from which to examine the uses and effects of androgynous dress and cross-dressing in the Deadwood Dick series.

This review revealed gaps within the literature on dime novels and dime novel culture that point to opportunities for future work. The majority of dime novel studies were published in the early to mid-twentieth century (Jones, 1976; O’Brien, 1922), with a few major publications

occurring towards the end of the century (Brown, 1997; Denning, 1998). The predominant focus of dime novel literature has been on the Western genre and the working-class culture embodied by dime novels; however, there is very little consideration given to the female characters. Seeing as the first dime novel featured a female protagonist and the first author was a woman, it would seem there would be more attention given to the roles that these women played. Although the majority of dime novel characters and protagonists were male, there was a contingency of strong female characters that has been neglected by scholars.

Interestingly, several dime novel scholars have discussed the relationships between the content of the novels and the social conditions of nineteenth century America, but have neglected to apply the concepts of reflection theory, performativity, and ecology of the self to their analyses of dime novels. The works of Lukacs (1971, 1983), Griswold (1981), and Jameson (1976) in the fields of literary criticism and reflection theory provide a useful and interesting lens through which to view dime novels. Using reflection theory to understand the complex relationships between society and literature aided in understanding the connections between the experiences of pioneer women and western female dime novel characters.

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective and Butler's (1990) works on performativity provided a useful lens through which to view the social interactions and presentations of self that occur in dime novels. The examination of female dime novel characters' manipulation of fronts, manners, and settings assisted in understanding how these presentations of self provide "expand[ed] possibilities of what it means to be a woman" (Butler, 1990, p. 3) in nineteenth century American society where such possibilities were rather limited. Further, gender performativity aided in understanding how the texts analyzed suggest that women deviated from the traditional "reiterative acts" that reinforce gender binaries (Butler, 1990, p. 2).

The geographic dislocation experienced by Westering women, both pioneers and western dime novel characters, required them to readjust to and improvise in their new environments. According to ecology of the self, changing environments can have a significant impact on an individual's sense of self. Hormuth's (1990) ecology of the self was a useful tool for examining how female dime novel characters adjusted to their new and changing surroundings through the manipulation of others, environments, and things. Individually, reflection theory, performativity, and ecology of the self are useful theories within their disciplines, but together they provided a rich theoretical framework from which to analyze and understand the complex interactions between society, gender performance, presentations of the self, and literature.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

For this study, narrative inquiry was used to collect, analyze, and make sense of the manipulation of gender, dress, and appearance of dime novel characters in the Deadwood Dick series. Further, narrative inquiry assisted the researcher in examining the fictional world of western dime novels within its historical context for linkages to nineteenth century American society. This chapter will present an overview of narrative inquiry and thematic analysis, the form of narrative analysis that will be used for this study. Lastly, the selection of dime novels analyzed and the methods used for data collection will be discussed.

### Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry, the examination of spoken, written, and visual materials, was used for this study. Abbott (2001) notes that narrative inquiry is the study of particulars: “particular actors, in particular social places, at particular social times” (p. 183). Relying on the experienced human story, this method of qualitative analysis is useful for analyzing and understanding long accounts with a common form (Riessman, 2008). Narrative inquiry is different from other qualitative approaches, such as grounded theory, in that stories are kept intact and “treated analytically as units” rather than theorizing across multiple cases by using categories (Riessman, 2008, p. 12). That is not to say that narrative inquiry does not generate categories or general concepts through close reading of individual cases; in the case of narrative inquiry, categories can emerge, but more attention is paid to details such as “*how* and *why* incidents are storied....For whom was *this* story constructed, and for what purpose” (Riessman, 2008, p. 11). Examination of the story and the ways in which the storyteller or author conveys particular characters, events, and times, as well as the listener’s and reader’s own imagination allows narrative research “to include many voices and subjectivities” (Riessman, 2008, p. 13) useful for

making sense of the past and for conceptualizing “lived and told stories” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 5).

For this study, thematic analysis was the most fitting form of narrative analysis because it is the common approach used to analyze written materials and is appropriate for “a wide range of narrative texts” (Riessman, 2008, p. 54). Whereas narrative inquiry as a whole examines what, how, to whom, and for what purposes a particular case is written, the thematic approach focuses on what is said, or the “told” rather than “the telling” (Mishler, 1995; Riessman, 2008). This study used words instead of numbers to interpret the told stories and to lend trustworthiness to “characterizing the phenomena of human experience” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Through extensive discussion with sociologist Maria Tamboukou, Riessman (2008) revealed several stages in Tamboukou’s research that were useful for the present analysis: educating oneself about the subject and important theoretical works, examining self-writings, creating thematic groups based on classifying statements, and “tack[ing] back and forth between primary data and the scholarship of others” (p. 66). Throughout the process of thematic analysis, key words and phrases are selected during the initial reading of the materials, excerpts are chosen during re-reading with general categories in mind, and emergent themes are interrogated historically and against gathered data and previous works (Riessman, 2008).

### **Sample and Data Collection**

Five western dime novels from the Deadwood Dick series, authored by Edward Wheeler between 1877 and 1885, were selected for analysis. Given the focus of the present work upon the dime novel as a window into the lives of frontier women, only Deadwood Dick novels featuring Calamity Jane were chosen for the sample. Thus, the selected sample includes the first dime novel of the series, *Deadwood Dick, the Prince of the Road; or, The Black Rider of the*

*Black Hills* (1877); as well as *Deadwood Dick on Deck; or Calamity Jane, The Heroine of Whoop-Up* (1878); *Deadwood Dick's Doom; or, Calamity Jane's Last Adventure* (1881); *Deadwood Dick's Big Deal; or, The Gold Brick of Oregon* (1883); and *Deadwood Dick's Diamonds; or, The Mystery of Joan Porter* (1885).

Data were collected by extracting all references to appearance included within the texts of the selected novels. For the purposes of this work, appearance was defined to include dress and the situated body and its attributes (Lillethun, 2007). Using Roach-Higgins and Eicher's (1992) definition of dress, references to body modifications (e.g., hair, skin, nails, muscular/skeletal system, teeth, breath) and body supplements (e.g., enclosures, attachments, and hand-held objects/accessories) were identified for analysis. References to the situated body and its attributes (e.g., age, health, skin, color, stature, and mood) also were extracted for analysis. Additionally, references to androgynous dress, or that which unites male and female in an attempt to neutralize gender differences, and cross-dressing, the use of dress to adopt a different gender, were extracted (Arnold, 2001; Butler, 1990). Lillethun and Roach-Higgins and Eicher suggest that the five senses (e.g., sight, smell, sound, touch, and taste) can be used to further describe appearance; as such, references to the sensory perception of appearance also were extracted for analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

In keeping with the conventions of the thematic analysis approach, the researcher read the data multiple times to identify key words and phrases that represent core meanings or ideas within the data. These core meanings and ideas were grouped into an initial set of general content categories. Then, through the process of re-reading and tacking back and forth “between the primary data, the literature, and the researcher’s own reflexive voice,” overarching and minor



themes emerged and were further clarified (Sanders, 2011, p. 273). Redundant themes were eliminated or combined and were developed into a coding guide that was applied to the data through a coding process, such that excerpts representing various themes were grouped and organized. The emergent overarching and minor themes revealed connections and conclusions about appearance, dress, and gender among female characters in the Deadwood Dick series, as well as the relationships between dime novel literature and nineteenth century American society by situating the findings within the historical context (Riessman, 2008).

Several measures were taken to increase trustworthiness and dependability of the data collection and analysis processes. First, throughout the coding process, the researcher and advisor met to discuss the coding process, including the meanings of the coded material. Second, an additional coder worked with the researcher to audit her (a) identification of text for inclusion within the sample and (b) application of the coding guide to the data. In both cases, an interrater reliability coefficient was calculated by dividing the total number of agreements (i.e., instances in which the researcher and the audit coder agree) by the total number of decisions made (i.e., decisions to include an article within the sample or to assign a specific code to a unit of text). All disagreements in decision-making were negotiated between the researcher and the audit coder.

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<sup>1</sup> References with an asterisk identify the dime novels that will be used in the analysis.

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## **APPENDIX I**



## Coding Guide

1. Gender Performances
  - 1.1 Reinforce gender binaries
    - 1.1.1 Reactions
    - 1.1.2 Dress and appearance
    - 1.1.3 Gender roles
    - 1.1.4 Gestures
  - 1.2 Challenge gender binaries
    - 1.2.1 Reactions
    - 1.2.2 Dress and appearance
    - 1.2.3 Gender roles
    - 1.2.4 Gestures
    - 1.2.5 Empowerment
- 2 Descriptions of Dress and Appearance
  - 2.1 Traditional feminine dress
    - 2.1.1 Tone/connotation of description
    - 2.1.2 Justification for use
    - 2.1.3 Influence on character's behavior/actions
  - 2.2 Androgynous dress
    - 2.2.1 Tone/connotation of description
    - 2.2.2 Justification for use
    - 2.2.3 Influence on character's behavior/actions
  - 2.3 Cross-dressing
    - 2.3.1 Tone/connotation of description
    - 2.3.2 Justification for use
    - 2.3.3 Influence on character's behavior/actions

## **APPENDIX II**

The “Hybrid Hero” in Western Dime Novels: An Analysis of Women’s Gender Performance,  
Dress, and Identity in the Deadwood Dick Series

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## **The “Hybrid Hero” in Western Dime Novels: An Analysis of Women’s Gender Performance, Dress, and Identity in the Deadwood Dick Series**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as American society became more industrialized, cities along the east coast grew exponentially (Denning, 1998). As rapid urbanization and growth pushed families westward to seek new opportunities, men and women often found themselves sharing in domestic and work-related activities. Men often took part in traditionally feminine duties such as cooking and cleaning, whereas women took on masculine duties such as farming, working outdoors, and tending animals and livestock (Helvenston, 1986). In turn, changes in gender roles and norms incited by westward movement brought about attendant changes in norms for gendered dress behaviors, particularly for women. Although many pioneer women continued to wear traditional feminine dress, they often had to adapt some of its more cumbersome and impractical components in order to perform their new roles with ease. Thus, androgynous dress and cross-dressing became common among frontier women for several reasons: to accommodate the physical lifestyle of the frontier, to negotiate the hegemonic power relationships between men and women on the frontier, to participate in male-dominated roles, and to assert a measure of independence from the rigid norms of 19<sup>th</sup> century society (Helvenston, 1986).

One important window into the lives of 19<sup>th</sup> century Americans – including shifts in norms for gendered role behaviors such as dress – can be found in the American dime novel. Dime novels have been said to “present a more accurate and vivid picture of the appearance, manner, speech, habits and methods of the pioneer western characters than do the more formal historians” (O’Brien, 1922, p. 3). Though dime novels provide an author’s imagined vision of western characters and their exploits, they are grounded in some reality and historical fact. With this in mind, dime novels can be a useful tool in gaining a rich understanding of the conditions in

which pioneer women worked and negotiated their appearances, genders, and identities through the use of androgynous dress and cross-dressing. Thus, this research was undertaken to gain an understanding of dime novels' reflection of 19<sup>th</sup> century American society, including women's negotiation of frontier life through the manipulation of gender, dress, and appearance. Of particular interest was how dress – including cross-dressing and androgynous dress – was used within the Deadwood Dick dime novel series to construct meanings about gender and identity.

### **Literature Review**

American history has been built upon a yearning for change and a keen capacity to adapt to ever-changing circumstances. As the following review reveals, westering women were no exception to this rule; when confronted with changes in expectations for how they should lead their lives, they readily made adaptations, accordingly.

### **Constructions of 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Womanhood**

In the years spanning 1820 and the Civil War, America witnessed the rise of new industries, businesses, and professions that spawned the emergence of a new middle class and along with it, a new ideology about womanhood. Referred to by Barbara Welter as the (1966) Cult of True Womanhood or Domesticity, this ideology identified four virtues of ideal womanhood: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, all of which promised happiness and power if performed in woman's "proper sphere" – the home. Although rhetoric promoting these virtues was rampant within popular literature, Welter (1966) has suggested that there also were "forces at work in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which impelled woman herself to change, to play a more active role in society" (p. 173). These forces included industrialism, social reform, the Civil War, and notably, westward migration. Indeed, owing to the intermingling of gender-specific chores on the frontier, some historians have questioned the influence of the Cult on westering women.

Although pioneer women made genuine efforts to maintain their images as proper ladies, they also modified the virtues of the Cult – which clashed with the daily necessities of life on the frontier – to suit their own needs (Cogan, 1989; Welter, 1966).

Thus, the lives of pioneer women may echo more closely themes identified with what Frances Cogan (1989) has referred to as The Ideal of Real Womanhood, which she offers as a critique of Welter's work. The Ideal of Real Womanhood asserts that women's spheres were broader than the private, domestic spheres dictated by the Cult of True Womanhood. Real Womanhood contends that the popular literature so notorious for advocating True Womanhood also can be interpreted as encouraging strength, independence, intelligence, and survival among women, both inside and outside the home. The Ideal of Real Womanhood therefore may reflect more truly the daily lives and struggles of women and marginalized groups who often worked both within the home and outside of the home, whether out of economic, religious, or political necessity, or for the sake of westward movement and the settlement of new frontiers (Cogan, 1989). Real Womanhood also closely mirrors the New Woman movement that emerged after the Civil War in response to women's growing discontent with the patriarchal systems in place. The New Woman movement sought to create sexual, social, and political transformation by encouraging women to gain an education, enter the workforce, and participate in social activities. As such, late 19<sup>th</sup> century society saw many changes for women, including increased political access and voting rights (particularly in the West), expanded educational and professional opportunities, and new social activities (Myres, 1982).

### **Gender, Identity, and Dress on the Frontier**

The perpetual relocation faced by pioneer women necessitated that they engage in a negotiation or reworking of identity as they moved through space and place (Blunt & Rose,

1994; Roberson, 1998). Roberson (1998) has referred to this process as the “politics of relocation.” For women relocating to the West, this negotiation process was achieved in part through changes in gender roles and social duties, as previously described, as well as in alterations to appearance (Blunt & Rose, 1994). Not all pioneer women, however, managed their appearances in a similar manner; a multiplicity of dress behaviors co-existed on the frontier.

Despite the uncomfortable, impractical, and sometimes dangerous nature of proper female dress on the frontier, many women insisted on preserving their feminine dress and appearance – including hoop skirts, corsets, tight bodices, voluminous skirts, and excessive trimmings – as a means of upholding and asserting their femininity in male-dominated contexts (Helvenston, 1990; Walker, 1998). Additionally, for many pioneer women, the maintenance of traditional feminine dress was important because fashion often served a social function, useful in establishing groups in which women could interact, share fashion advice, and hold onto vestiges of their femininity. Thus, there is evidence that even small, isolated frontier communities acted as “microcosms” in which women created networks amongst themselves for discussing fashion and sustaining feminine ideals of appearance (Helvenston, 1990).

Although many women sought to maintain vestiges of traditional feminine dress on the frontier, others understood the impracticality of doing so, and so adopted a much more simplified and practical version of traditional feminine dress or radical “utility” fashions, such as the Bloomer dress and the Mother Hubbard dress (Helvenston, 1986). Although these utility fashions provided westering women comfort and freedom for their new roles, they would not have been considered socially acceptable in eastern society.

Some pioneering women violated gender role expectations for dress in an even more ostentatious manner than wearing utility dress, adopting men’s clothing and a male appearance

(Helvenston, 1990; Walker, 1998) for reasons of physical comfort, social convenience, and personal safety as well as to participate in male-dominated roles. Thus, many women adopted androgynous dress (i.e., body modification or body supplements that unite male and female in an attempt to neutralize gender differences [Arnold, 2001]) and cross-dressing (i.e., body modifications or supplements used to adopt a different gender [Arnold, 2001; Butler, 1990]) as a means of negotiating changing gender roles and performing tasks necessary for survival on the frontier. For many women, not having to follow fashion provided a sense of relief and liberation (Helvenston, 1990). As women took on these new identities and learned different ways to consider themselves, they felt both more self-sufficient and empowered (Blunt & Rose, 1994; Roberson, 1998). Thus, androgynous dress and cross-dressing became forms of “hybridity” for negotiating changes in geographic space, bodily place, identity, and hegemonic power relationships between men and women on the frontier (Blunt & Rose, 1994, p. 17).

### **Dime Novels as a Reflection of National Character**

The term “dime novel” encompasses a wide range of commercial, mass-produced popular fiction narratives published between the 1840s and 1890s and sold for anywhere from five to twenty-five cents (Denning, 1998). Although, as a body of literature, the dime novel often was regarded as cheap, sensationalist popular fiction, many scholars consider dime novels to be an important primary source of information about working-class culture, pioneer and western life, and 19<sup>th</sup> century Americans (Denning, 1998; Jones, 1978; O’Brien, 1922). Of particular interest in the present work is the Western dime novel, and in particular, the Deadwood Dick series. It has been said that as mid-19<sup>th</sup> century America was undergoing labor strife, economic worries, and increased industrialization, the Western dime novel “functioned increasingly as a vehicle for social criticism and spiritual reaffirmation” (Jones, 1978, p. 56). Western dime novelists often



concentrated their stories on one protagonist, or “hybrid hero,” who participated in multiple plots by creating multiple identities, “simply by changing [her] clothes” (Jones, 1978, p. 42). Female protagonists often adopted androgynous dress and/or cross-dressing to pass as a male, neutralize gender differences, perform traditionally masculine roles more effectively, and switch between various identities (Jones, 1978). Both male and female dime novel characters used androgynous dress and cross-dressing as a means of achieving “hybridity” (Blunt & Rose, 1994) in space and place and of creating the “hybrid hero” identity (Jones, 1978).

The Deadwood Dick series was penned by dime novelist Edward L. Wheeler between 1877 and 1885 and traces the adventures of Deadwood Dick, an outlaw road agent in the Black Hills of Deadwood, South Dakota. Calamity Jane, a major recurring female character in the series, is “the feminine counterpart of Deadwood Dick” (Smith, 1978, p. 117). Owing to a mysterious event in her past, Calamity Jane is transformed from a refined young woman to a ruthless, gun-slinging character who acts as an outlaw road agent and drinks whiskey, smokes cigars, plays cards, swears, fights, shoots, and dresses like a man (Jones, 1978; Smith, 1978). Her dress and appearance often are described in great detail, perhaps owing to the fact that, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was unusual for women to adopt the dress of men.

## **Theoretical Groundings**

### **Reflection Theory**

Reflection theory proposes that “cultural products such as literature in some way mirror the social order” (Griswold, 1981, p. 740). As such, reflection theory is useful in understanding the complex relationships between society and literature. According to White (1980), literature provides unique access to social structures and history of a given society and/or time period that other cultural or linguistic artifacts cannot. In particular, White notes that literature has the

“power to transcend, criticize, or at least self-consciously comment on the structure of those social conditions under which literary works are produced” (White, 1980, p. 364). Thus, literary works such as dime novels have the ability not only to provide insight into culture and society, but also to critique and comment on the social conditions of the times. Examining dime novels through the lens of reflection theory will allow themes regarding the social and cultural conditions of society, as well as themes about dress, appearance, gender, and identity to emerge.

### **Performativity**

Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical perspective proposes that, in everyday life, people stage (role) performances of the self as they behave and appear before others. Key to the notion of performance is the personal front, which includes expressive equipment (e.g., dress, gender, speech) that the performer utilizes in order for the audience to identify him or her. Overall, the goal of the actor’s various presentations of self is to gain acceptance from the audience through the manipulation of fronts, manners, and settings (Goffman, 1959). During social transactions and performances, reviews (evaluations about the wearer by the audience) and programs (evaluations about the wearer by the wearer) can coincide or clash, leading to either the validation of the self or to the modification and redefinition of self (Stone, 1995).

Judith Butler’s (1990) work on the performative nature of gender is relevant to the present work in that it proposes that gender performances serve to create and shape rather than to reflect individuals’ identities. Thus, according to Butler, men and women may create and maintain gendered performances that society deems socially acceptable and appropriate through the “stylization of the body” (Butler, 1990, p. 191). On the other hand, they may choose to go against society’s gender norms by taking part in subversive bodily acts such as drag, cross-dressing, and androgynous dress, which allow for experimentation with a variety of gender

identities and create “expand[ed] possibilities” of what it means to be a man or woman (Butler, 1990, p. 3). In this vein, Butler proposes that gender is unstable and can be manipulated in various ways to create different performative identities, such as androgyny and cross-dressing, through the manipulation of acts, gestures, appearance, and dress.

### **Research Questions**

Although dime novels are recognized as a valuable reflection of 19<sup>th</sup> century working class culture and mores, to date, very little scholarly attention has been dedicated to examining how the female characters of this literary genre are portrayed. The Western dime novel provides a rich sample of 19<sup>th</sup> century American culture and dress norms from which to examine the uses and effects of androgynous dress and cross-dressing. In particular, dime novels provide insight into how androgynous dress and cross-dressing were important in assisting “hybrid hero” characters in creating various identities in order to participate in multiple plots (Jones, 1978). As such, the present narrative inquiry was undertaken to fill gaps in the literature by addressing the following research questions: What roles do female characters play in the Deadwood Dick series? How does the author of the Deadwood Dick series use dress and appearance to describe female characters? How is gender performed in the Deadwood Dick series? How is androgynous dress and cross-dressing used by female characters to perform gender in the Deadwood Dick series? How does dress create a sense of identity and place for female characters? How do dime novels from the Deadwood Dick series reflect 19<sup>th</sup> century American values and social concerns?

### **Method**

Narrative inquiry – the examination of spoken, written, and/or visual materials – was used to analyze the manipulation of gender, dress, and appearance of dime novel characters in the Deadwood Dick series. This method of qualitative analysis is useful for analyzing long

accounts with a common form and is different from other qualitative approaches, such as grounded theory, in that accounts (i.e., stories) are kept intact and “treated analytically as units” rather than theorizing across multiple cases by using categories (Riessman, 2008, p. 12). That is not to say that narrative inquiry does not generate categories or general concepts through close reading of individual cases; in the case of narrative inquiry, categories can emerge, but more attention is paid to details such as “*how* and *why* incidents are storied....For whom was *this* story constructed, and for what purpose” (Riessman, 2008, p. 11). For this study, thematic analysis was the most fitting form of narrative analysis because it is commonly used to analyze written materials (Riessman, 2008).

### **Sample and Data Collection**

Five western dime novels from the Deadwood Dick series were selected for analysis. Given the focus of this work upon the dime novel as a window into the lives of frontier women, only Deadwood Dick novels featuring Calamity Jane were chosen for the sample: *Deadwood Dick, the Prince of the Road; or, The Black Rider of the Black Hills* (1877); *Deadwood Dick on Deck; or, Calamity Jane, the Heroine of Whoop-Up* (1878); *Deadwood Dick's Doom; or, Calamity Jane's Last Adventure* (1881); *Deadwood Dick's Big Deal; or, The Gold Brick of Oregon* (1883); and *Deadwood Dick's Diamonds; or, The Mystery of Joan Porter* (1885).

Data were collected by extracting all references to women's appearance included within the texts of the selected novels. Appearance includes dress and the situated body and its attributes (Lillethun, 2007). Using Roach-Higgins and Eicher's (1992) definition of dress, references to body modifications (e.g., hair, skin, nails, muscular/skeletal system, teeth, breath) and body supplements (e.g., enclosures, attachments, and hand-held objects/accessories) were

identified for analysis. References to the situated body and its attributes (e.g., age, health, skin, color, stature, and mood) also were extracted for analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

In keeping with the conventions of the thematic analysis approach, the researcher read the data multiple times to identify key words and phrases that represented core meanings or ideas within the data. These core meanings and ideas were grouped into an initial set of general content categories. Then, through the process of re-reading and tacking back and forth “between the primary data, the literature, and the researcher’s own reflexive voice,” overarching and minor themes emerged and were further clarified (Sanders, 2011, p. 273). Redundant themes were eliminated or combined, resulting in the development of a coding guide that was applied to the data through a coding process, such that excerpts representing various themes were grouped and organized. The emergent overarching and minor themes revealed connections and conclusions about appearance, dress, and gender among female characters in the Deadwood Dick series, as well as the relationships between dime novel literature and 19<sup>th</sup> century American society by situating the findings within the historical context (Riessman, 2008).

To ensure the trustworthiness and dependability of the data analysis process, an audit coder also worked with the researcher to check her (a) identification of text for inclusion within the sample and (b) application of the coding guide to the data. In both cases, an interrater reliability coefficient was calculated by dividing the total number of agreements by the total number of decisions made. All disagreements in decision-making were negotiated between the researcher and the audit coder. The interrater reliability coefficients for inclusion of text within the sample and for the application of the coding guide were both 91%.

## Results

Analyses revealed the importance of dress and gender performance as a means of situating female characters in their geographic and bodily spaces and places on the frontier. As discussed below, three overarching themes were identified within the data: (a) traditionally feminine dress juxtaposed against constructions of 19<sup>th</sup> century American womanhood, (b) the role of androgynous dress in creating nontraditional gender identity, and (c) cross-dressing as a means of navigating temporary changes in space and place.

### **Traditionally Feminine Dress Juxtaposed against Constructions of 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Womanhood**

The majority of female characters in the *Deadwood Dick* series wore and used traditional, feminine dress, with some consideration for social context apparent. Dresses, skirts, jewelry, parasols, and hand bags constituted the backbone of the traditional, feminine appearances in the series, with characters donning more elaborate dress for outings and meetings with male characters and simpler dress for physically demanding tasks. The author's descriptions of Virgie Verner's and Madame Minnie Majilton's dress, respectively, provide representative accounts of the traditional, feminine dress commonly worn by female characters in the series:

The young lady evidently was not over seventeen or eighteen years of age, but was the possessor of a fine figure, and prettily chiseled features, set off by starry black eyes, and wavy brown hair. She was attired with a long ulster duster over her dress, a silk scarf about her throat, and a veiled [sic] hat upon her head, and was by all odds the trimmest little craft that had anchored in Death Notch. (*Deadwood Dick's Doom*, 1881, p. 2)

The madame...was looking most royally beautiful in a suit of silk and lace, with diamonds at her throat and pendent from her ears. Her blonde complexion made her ever fresh and lovely looking, and then her superb form greatly heightened her personal beauty. (*Deadwood Dick on Deck*, 1878, p. 18)

The dress described in the excerpts above reveals that Virgie and Minnie sought to maintain vestiges of their femininity on the western frontier by dressing in the latest fashions of the era.

This commitment to maintenance of fashion on the frontier was a trend that cut across the entire Deadwood Dick series and the *majority* of its female characters. That is, the components of traditional, feminine dress described – silk and lace garments, two-piece dresses, the Ulster, veiled hats, and accessories such as scarves and diamonds – remained quite constant throughout the series and reflected the latest trends of the time (Tortora & Eubank, 2005).

In addition to adopting traditionally gendered dress, the majority of female characters performed in conventional ways, conducting themselves as “proper” ladies and embodying the virtues of True Womanhood – including piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity – in their performances (cf., Welter, 1966). Components of gender performance that supported these virtues included emotional reactions to danger and stress, gestures of weakness and distress, dependence on and deference to male protectors, and engagement in activities of the domestic sphere. Words used to characterize female gender performances – such as pretty, pure, sweet, proper, sensible, emotional, and helpless – supported traditional gender binaries and constructed women as something to be “looked at” and as delicate, sensitive, and at the mercy of their bodies. The following excerpts demonstrate such constructions of womanhood:

Redburn gave an involuntary cry of incredulity and admiration as his eyes rested upon the picture—upon the pure, sweet face, surrounded by a wealth of golden, glossy hair, and the sylph-like form, so perfect.... (*Deadwood Dick, the Prince of the Road*, 1877, p. 4)  
There was a scream of agony, just here, and a heavy fall. Anita had fainted! Redburn sprung from his seat, ran over to her side, and raised her tenderly in his arms. ‘Poor thing!’ he murmured, gazing into her pale, still face, ‘the shock was too much for her. No wonder she fainted.’ (*Deadwood Dick, the Prince of the Road*, 1877, p. 11)

The notion of gender conformity is supported here in that there is accordance between social expectations of femininity and the appearances and behaviors of female characters. These idealized performances of women as pretty, passive participants in the private sphere support Goffman’s (1959) proposition that generally speaking, performances “exemplify the officially

accredited values of the society” (p. 35). The characters above, Miss Terry and Anita, provided idealized performances of femininity by adopting values deemed socially acceptable by 19<sup>th</sup> century society, thereby reaffirming their geographic and bodily locations or identities (Jacob & Cerny, 2004; Stone, 1995).

Within the context of the *Deadwood Dick* series, however, the portrayal of female characters was not limited to gender performances defined by the virtues of the Cult of True Womanhood; the adventures of these fictitious, westering women – like those of real pioneers – sometimes necessitated modified gender performances that challenged these virtues and that were more reminiscent of Cogan’s (1989) conceptualization of Real Womanhood and the New Woman movement. Throughout the series, there were instances in which female characters were forced to act outside of the private sphere and to alter their dress and gender performances, accordingly, most often for purposes of survival. Here, then, female characters such as Virgie Verner and Madame Minnie Majilton donned subdued, practical dresses that lent themselves well to the physical tasks at hand and/or added hand-held objects such as revolvers or knives to their personal fronts, juxtaposing these weapons against a backdrop of traditionally feminine dress. Although these characters’ performances did not follow the expectations of society in every regard, their appearances remained feminine, albeit altered, in order to better situate themselves in their new expanded spheres and locations.

### **The Role of Androgynous Dress in Creating Nontraditional Gender Identity**

In contrast to the majority of female characters, who adopted traditional, feminine appearances, Calamity Jane, the series’ recurring female protagonist, utilized androgynous dress and appearance to create a nontraditional gender identity that she felt best embodied and reflected her sense of self. Viewing Calamity’s gender performance through the lens of



Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective and Butler's (1990) work on the performative nature of gender reveals the importance of appearance and manners in creating believable androgynous gender performances and identities. In addition, Stone's (1995) work on appearance is helpful in understanding the influences and outcomes of judgments on characters' presentations of the self and identity management/formation.

**Appearance.** Although the younger, more feminine Calamity Jane was featured in the *Deadwood Dick* series only as part of the character's "backstory," the author invokes her past life to demonstrate the effects of westward movement and the "politics of relocation" on her adult gender identity (Roberson, 1998). That is, by detailing the metamorphosis of Calamity Jane from a demure and femininely dressed 16 year old to an androgynously dressed and behaving adult woman, the author effectively demonstrates the ways in which the demands frontier life and a growing disconnect with her feminized identity necessitated that Calamity reconfigure her gender performances. The author sets her transformation into motion with a mysterious event – the details of which are not disclosed to the reader – that prompts Calamity to move westward, where she abandons the trappings of the feminized version of the self. This change in her appearance is incited, in part, by the sheer practicality and utility of an androgynous appearance for life on the frontier. Calamity, herself, recognizes as much in the following excerpt from *Deadwood Dick on Deck*: 'I don't allow ye ken beat men's togs much for handy locomotion an' so forth' (1878, p. 24). Other characters in the novels, too, share Calamity's assessment of the expediency of her androgynous frontier appearance, including Colonel Joe Tubbs, who remarks that Calamity's wearing of men's attire is prudent, owing to the risks of traveling and living alone as a woman on the frontier.

Beyond practical considerations, Calamity's abandonment of her feminized self and her subsequent adoption of an androgynous appearance seemingly reflects a felt disconnect between her embodied physicality and the mandates of her culture, which had previously pressured her to conform to cultural expectations of womanhood and domesticity:

'But, excuse me, please, you're a woman, are you not?' 'Well, yes, I reckon I am in flesh, but not in spirit o' late years. Ye see, they kind o' got matters discomfuddled w'en I was created, an' I turned out to be a gal instead of a man, which I ought to hev been [sic].'  
(*Deadwood Dick on Deck*, 1878, p. 23)

She justifies her gender performance and appearance by suggesting that it accurately represents her true sense of self, which does not wholly efface her female sex, but instead incorporates components of both feminine and masculine appearance and performance. Thus, consistent with androgyny's attempt to neutralize gender difference by bringing together male and female in one body, the author's descriptions of Calamity Jane provide a glimpse into both the feminine and masculine aspects of her appearance.

She was the possessor of a form both graceful and womanly, and a face that was peculiarly handsome and attractive, though upon it were lines drawn by the unmistakable hand of dissipation and hard usage. . . . The lips and eyes still retained. . . their girlish beauty. . . the face proper had the power to become stern, grave or jolly in expression, wreathed partially as it was in a semi-framework of long, raven hair that reached below a faultless waist. Her dress was buckskin trowsers [sic], met at the knee by fancifully beaded leggings, with slippers of dainty pattern upon the feet; a velvet vest, and one of those luxuries of the mines, a boiled shirt, open at the throat, partially revealing a breast of alabaster purity; a short, velvet jacket, and Spanish broad-brimmed hat, slouched one side of a regally beautiful head. There were diamond rings upon her hands, a diamond pin in her shirt-bosom, a massive gold chain strung across her vest-front. . . . A belt around her waist contained a solitary revolver of large caliber; and this, along with a rifle strapped to her back comprised her outfit. (*Deadwood Dick on Deck*, 1878, p. 4)

Insomuch as the above description juxtaposes traditionally feminine with traditionally masculine characteristics – such as hard-living and dainty, girlish and stern – along with components of appearance – such as faultless waist and buckskin trousers, breast of alabaster purity and boiled shirt of the mines, and diamond rings and weapons – it highlights well the androgyny and

hybridity of Calamity's character. Also implicit here is Butler's (1990) assertion that "various acts of gender create the idea of gender," although, in Calamity Jane's case, the presentation of that gender is clearly a nontraditional, amalgamated one (p. 190).

Although Calamity Jane's character and appearance initially come off as "reckless" and haphazard, the preceding passage and others like it also reveal that Calamity may, in fact, engage in some "thoughtful, behind-the-scenes planning" in which she purposefully selects various components of masculinity and femininity for her various audiences to (re)view and evaluate (Jacob & Cerny, 2004, p. 125). Such reviews – or assignments of value words and value-laden responses (Stone, 1995) by various characters in the series – provide further insight into the hybridity that characterizes Calamity's appearance, and in particular, into the changing norms and gendered dress behaviors of mid- to late-19<sup>th</sup> century American society. For instance, throughout the series, there were over 60 instances in which value words were used by the author and characters to review Calamity Jane's appearance, including: girl-in-breeches, girl dare-devil, boss gal, mountain knight, eccentric girl/creature, and reckless buchario of the hills. Although many of these value words further substantiate the androgyny of Calamity's character by incorporating masculine and feminine value words, some of them demonstrate the negative responses of some characters to Calamity's nontraditional gender performance. The first two books of the series, in particular, included numerous negative reviews of Calamity Jane's appearance, by both female and male characters. Typically, these reviews were made in response to her use of men's pants rather than traditionally feminine dress and included reactions of incredulity and confusion:

'I don't suppose because a woman wears male attire that she is necessarily a fool; though why a female must lower her sex by appearing in men's garb, I see not. She must be an eccentric creature—rather a hard case, is she not?' (*Deadwood Dick on Deck*, 1878, p. 2)

Interestingly, in the last three books, Calamity's appearance was not described to the same extent as in earlier novels, and the use of value words in the descriptions significantly decreased. The reactions and responses to Calamity's appearance also became more accepting, particularly among male characters. The decrease in attention paid to her appearance and in characters' acceptance of her gender performance may be attributed to the audience's and characters' familiarity with Calamity Jane's character throughout the series. However, it also may reflect changes in gender norms and gendered dress behaviors brought on by the New Woman movement occurring in the final years of 19<sup>th</sup> century American society (Heilmann, 2000). Much of the discourse on the New Woman movement was created in popular literature such as dime novels, featuring heroines like Calamity Jane who appeared and behaved in resistance to socially constructed ideals of masculinity and femininity (Heilmann, 2000).

**Manners.** Goffman (1959) refers to manners as "those stimuli which function at the time to warn us of the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation," and notes that the audience expects there to be consistency between appearance and manner in performances (p. 24). Along with appearance cues, the actions and gestures of Calamity Jane give further clues as to the intention of her performances. Calamity, outfitted in buckskin trousers, vest, shirt, boots, revolvers and rifles, further reinforces her androgynous gender performance by taking part in traditionally masculine acts and by adopting certain gestures more commonly invoked by male characters. In *Deadwood Dick on Deck* (1878), a male character describes Calamity Jane's manners as such:

'She's a dare-devil, Sandy....She ar' the most reckless buchario in ther Hills, kin drink whisky, shute, play keerds, or sw'ar, ef et comes ter et; but, 'twixt you an' me, I reckon ther gal's got honor left wi' her grit out o' ther wreck o' a young life [sic].' (p. 2)

Throughout the male character's description, he hints at his simultaneously conflicting feelings of admiration and incredulity at the masculinity and femininity embodied in the character of Calamity Jane. These conflicting reviews are rich with value words and value-laden responses – such as the comparison of her honor and grit versus her wreck of a life – and echo those of other characters and the author.

The consistency between Calamity Jane's appearance and manners was an important aspect of creating and maintaining a convincing gender performance and identity. There were over 50 instances in which the use of traditionally masculine aspects of dress were central in making her actions and gestures more believable. In particular, the use of weapons and cigars/cigarettes gave Calamity a measure of credibility among male characters that allowed unprejudiced participation in gun fights, rescuing and defending others, and gaining admission into saloons.

As she entered the High Jack saloon...she advanced to the bar, and ordered a glass of wine, which she paid for, and drank....Leaving the bar, she sauntered over to a poker table, where Fen Franklin and Halsey were playing poker, the faro game having 'petered out,' for the night. 'Howdy, gents. How's luck running, tonight?' she said, taking a cigarette from her pocket, and lighting it...'D'ye think you can make a run on it?'....'Perhaps you were afraid to bluff!' the girl sport said, with a smile, as she drew a chair to the table....Calamity now dove down into her pocket, bringing forth several gold pieces, and a roll of bank notes, among which hundred-dollar bills were not wanting. (*Deadwood Dick's Diamonds*, 1885, p. 4)

Whereas weapons gave Calamity power over male characters and assisted in asserting her independence, the use of other hand-held objects and accessories such as cigars, cards, canes, and hats provided important finishing touches to her appearance that lent her an air of authenticity and respect, allowing her to participate in several traditionally masculine activities like gambling, drinking, and socializing at saloons. The authenticity and congruency between these two aspects of performance aided Calamity in moving successfully and easily throughout

the western male-dominated public sphere and in being a “hybrid hero,” which enabled her to participate in multiple plots through changes in appearance (Jones, 1978).

The consistency between her androgynous appearance and manners, particularly the masculine components, created a genuine and straightforward gender performance for her audience. Although not all characters were able to fully understand Calamity Jane’s character, they did accept her gender performance as a compulsory part of her role as a frontier woman, road-agent, and detective. The accordance between programs and reviews of Calamity’s appearance resulted in the long-term adoption of an androgynous gender identity. The general responses of male characters to her nontraditional gender performance became more accepting and respectful over the course of the series. These validating responses coupled with her character’s sense of self created conditions in which Calamity did not appear to feel pressured to make changes to her appearance, which often was the case with female characters who attempted to cross-dress. Further, it allowed her the freedom to move about the public and private spheres with ease and without harassment. Thus, the ability to move freely about society and the generally validating reviews from the audience resulted in an androgynous gender identity that Calamity Jane maintained for much of the series.

### **Cross-Dressing as a Means of Navigating Temporary Changes in Space and Place**

Female characters in the Deadwood Dick series utilized cross-dressing as a means of navigating temporary changes in space and place, such as westward movement, and for participating in the public and private spheres. As the New Woman movement was taking hold in the final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women were asserting their independence by entering the workforce and going to school, as well as by challenging traditional dress norms. The ideals of the New Woman also were demonstrated by female characters featured in popular fiction;

Heilmann (2000) notes that “female cross-dressing developed as a theme in *fin-de-siècle* feminist fiction,” which conceptualized “concerns of the first women’s movement in the metaphor of masquerade” (p. 85). Two specific uses of cross-dressing were discovered throughout the series: cross-dressing for disguise and cross-dressing for survival. Although cross-dressing for purposes of disguise was presented as a more acceptable form of cross-dressing, for the most part, characters who cross-dressed were able to gain empowerment through their performances.

**Cross-dressing for disguise.** Cross-dressing for disguise was adopted primarily by Calamity Jane. Although androgyny was Calamity’s preferred gender identity, various plot developments necessitated that she frequently adopt alternative “hybrid hero” identities and modes of dress and appearance in order to disguise her unmistakable “girl-in-breeches” appearance (Jones, 1978). This was done in order to lend assistance to and rescue male characters in trouble and to solve mysteries and wrong-doings. In one scene, Calamity disguised herself in order to rescue Deadwood Dick, her husband and “pard” at the time, by infiltrating the gang of men who kidnapped him:

Dick uttered an ejaculation of surprise as his gaze rested upon Calamity Jane, the same as he had seen her in Goldburg [wearing a buckskin suit, short curly hair, and a black mustache], except that she was covered in dirt. ‘How in the world did you get in here!’ he cried, in an undertone. She smiled, oddly. ‘Why, I was here every minute as soon as you were....I managed to make myself one of the pursuing party, without any one but myself being the wiser for it.’ (*Deadwood Dick’s Diamonds*, 1885, p. 10)

Most often Calamity disguised herself as a rough miner or an older man. The adoption of male dress and appearance, including facial hair, allowed her to move with even more ease in public places such as saloons, banks, and mining camps because she was not recognized as being a woman in male attire; rather, she blended in as just another male character.

Although Calamity’s androgynous appearance received mixed reviews, her cross-dressing performances received more positive reviews consistent with those made of male

characters. Value words – including youth, pleasant, armed, and beardless – used in descriptions of and responses to her disguises indicate the author’s and characters’ acceptance of Calamity as a male character in those instances.

Seated at a table in a somewhat retired corner were two persons engaged at cards. One was a beardless youth attired in buck-skin, and armed with knife and pistols. . . . Still the youth kept on, a quiet smile resting on his pleasant features, a twinkle in his coal-black eye. The youth, dear reader, you have met before. *He* is not he, but instead—Calamity Jane! (*Deadwood Dick, the Prince of the Road*, 1877, p. 7)

The temporary nature of Calamity’s adoption of cross-dressing for disguise, may, in fact, explain the lack of attention paid to her nontraditional gender performance. Because the use of disguise promises the audience and the reader that it is a temporary adoption of a nontraditional gender performance, the reactions and descriptions vary from those of her androgynous performance. The author offers a somewhat nonchalant presentation of the character, in that the descriptions of dress and appearance are more succinct and are treated with less distinction than are those of androgynous dress or cross-dressing for survival.

**Cross-dressing for survival.** Whereas cross-dressing for disguise was utilized in order to assist characters and solve mysteries, cross-dressing for survival was enacted for purposes of westward movement, especially to escape and hide from a male character. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was not customary for women to travel alone, especially not cross-country into the largely unsettled West. The most prominent cross-dressing female in the dime novels analyzed, Dusty Dick, first took on a masculine appearance in the East when she was escaping from her abusive husband. She relied on her masculine appearance to safely move westward in search of a new beginning until one day she was discovered sleeping by one of the male protagonists of the story, Sandy, who originally thought her to be a young boy, but quickly began to question this initial assessment of gender identity:



Sandy...gazed into the sheltered little nook, where a plump, graceful form was lying—that of a boy of eighteen, with a pretty, beardless face, which was so composed and at rest, in slumber, and curling chestnut hair which reached down upon the finely-shaped shoulders. A boy; *was* it a boy? The form was clad in male habiliments, and there was a boyish look to the finely-chiseled features, which defied the suspicion of femininity in the sleeper. A plain frontier costume of coarse cloth, neatly fitting the graceful form of only medium hight [sic]; the feet incased in knee-boots of a fine leather, and a Spanish wide-rim felt hat lying upon the grass, were items of the beautiful sleeper's outfit. Weapons he carried none, outwardly exhibited—yet, here in the depths of the mountain, lying in sweet repose, was the youthful waif—who was it? (*Deadwood Dick on Deck*, 1878, p. 7)

The components of dress and appearance that alert Sandy as to the ambiguity of Dusty's gender were the lack of facial hair and weapons and the long curling hair. Alternatively, the frontier costume, boots, and wide-rim hat signaled the possible masculinity of the character.

Upon Dusty's awakening, she was startled and reacted in a traditionally feminine way, trembling with fright. This lapse in masculine performance by Dusty confirmed Sandy's suspicions, causing his reaction towards her to be that of a protector rather than that of an equal.

After agreeing to help Dusty Dick maintain her cross-dressing performance and to take her in as his "pard," Sandy considers how best to improve her disguise: "I reckon a false mustache would make more of a man of you, and you would then pass muster. You can turn a hand at cooking, and occasionally, to avoid suspicion, can peck away in the mines" (*Deadwood Dick on Deck*, 1878, p. 7). It is interesting that although Sandy seeks to make Dusty's masculinity more believable by affixing a false mustache on her face and having her occasionally work in the mines, he also expects her to cook. Thus, Sandy is willing to assist Dusty in creating an authentic masculine performance for the public's view but is unwilling to allow her masculine performance in the private sphere, perhaps because it would require him (and readers) to accept such a blatant violation of social and gender norms. The (in)ability of his character to accept Dusty's masculine performance reflects the social realities and tensions present and in flux on the western frontier in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Once Dusty Dick's cross-dressing disguise was finalized, the novel's focus turned to ensuring that the other aspects of her performance, manners, and settings were consistent with her appearance. That is, Sandy did not deem Dusty's performance sincere or believable until she fully adopted masculine manners and participated in male-dominated settings. Sandy advised Dusty to "forget you are a woman, and all will go well," (*Deadwood Dick on Deck*, 1878, p. 8). Initially, Dusty found this advice difficult to heed, with her masculine performances frequently featuring slips of the personal front that revealed her feminine identity (e.g., femininely "coded" emotions and reactions). Thus, although the male characters in Whoop-Up were taken in by Dusty's masculine performance, the female characters saw through these performances, with Madame Minnie proclaiming her to be "no more of a man than I am" (*Deadwood Dick on Deck*, 1878, p. 8). After the women's declarations of Dusty's femininity, Sandy encouraged Dusty to play her part and reaffirm her masculine gender performance in a male-dominated setting. To this end, Dusty demonstrated her mastery "of the vernacular and bravado of the mines" (*Deadwood Dick on Deck*, 1878, p. 13) when she visited a saloon:

'Let out ther sherry wine for me, ye galoot!' Dusty Dick replied, ranging himself along the bar, and addressing the barkeeper. 'Hurry up yer stumps, or I'll get over ther an' grab a hold o' ther ribbons myself.' The bottle was quickly forthcoming, and Dick swallowed a few drops of the wine. (*Deadwood Dick on Deck*, 1878, p. 13)

This convincing performance – in which Dusty Dick adopts the dress, language, and manner of a hard-working, uneducated, and tough man – represents a turning point in the novel, after which both Dusty Dick as well as her audiences embrace her masculine gender performances, particularly within public spheres. For much of the first half of the dime novel, Dusty appears masculine, but behaves femininely; however, upon realizing the believability of her masculine performance, she appears and more often behaves masculine within the private sphere. That is, the confidence experienced by Dusty while socializing in public, coupled with

male characters' acceptance of her as a male miner, influenced her private sphere self. Despite Dusty's success at presenting a masculine gender performance, she does eventually give up cross-dressing and marries Sandy. As is the case with Dusty Dick, Heilmann (2000) notes that it is common for cross-dressing heroines to return to traditionally feminine appearances and "occupations" once their agendas and goals within the public sphere have been met. Cross-dressing served its purpose as a tool of concealment from her abusive husband and as a tool of survival in the male-dominated western frontier. Further, cross-dressing allowed Dusty Dick to negotiate temporary changes in geographic space – as she was relocating and living on the western frontier – and bodily place during the negotiation of her social place and identity as a single woman in male-dominated contexts (Roberson, 1998).

### **Conclusions**

As reflection theory reminds us, popular literature such as the Western dime novel may provide insights into the values and social concerns of the time period in which it is produced. Indeed, such is the case for the Deadwood Dick novels, which were written during a time of social unrest and change and which provide a glimpse into the sexual, social, and political concerns of late 19<sup>th</sup> century American society. As noted, late 19<sup>th</sup> century society saw many changes for women, which in turn, prompted changes in gender norms and gendered dress behaviors (Myres, 1982). Connections between the fictional characters of the Deadwood Dick series and real western pioneers became apparent as issues related to gender norms and appearance in the dime novels reflected those of 19<sup>th</sup> century society (Cogan, 1989; Helvenston, 1986; White, 1980). Through the manipulation of appearance, gender performance, and identity among female characters, the author, consciously or not, provided a critique of cultural and political anxieties by breaking down social constructions of gender. That is, whether traditional

feminine dress, androgynous dress, or cross-dressing was used by female characters in the series, each reflected aspects of change in space and place experienced by real pioneer women.

The transition in ideological views of 19<sup>th</sup> century womanhood is reflected in the dime novels by alterations in appearance and gender performance that enabled traditionally feminine characters to act in expanded spheres of knowing and being (Cogan, 1989; Roberson, 1998). In exchange for the more impractical and cumbersome aspects of traditionally feminine dress, both pioneer women and dime novel characters adopted utility dress (oftentimes including weapons) better suited for the demands of frontier life (Myres, 1982). Many pioneer women revealed in their diaries that they liked their “Western appearance,” while other women commented on their androgynous dress; Mary Alice Shutes wrote in her journal, “I am dressed like Charles and straddle my horse” (in Roberson, 1998, p. 230). Calamity Jane’s androgynous appearance and hybridity resonate well with the real-life experiences of pioneer women who adopted aspects of masculine appearance in order to better situate themselves in their new and changing geographic spaces and bodily places (Helvenston, 1990; Roberson, 1998). For many women, not having to follow 19<sup>th</sup> century society’s constructions of gender resulted in feelings of relief and liberation as well as the confidence to participate in activities outside of the private sphere (Helvenston, 1986; Walker, 1998). Such were the feelings of cross-dressing pioneer women and dime novel characters who, through acts of personal and political resistance, reflected women’s growing “discontent with the restrictive norms of femininity,” a leading force behind the New Woman movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Heilmann, 2000, p. 83). For the “New Woman,” instances of real-life cross-dressing tended to be temporary and for the purposes of accomplishing a task – including admission into male-dominated professions, feminist activism and rebellion – as was the case with female dime novel characters (Heilmann, 2000). Thus, the examination of female

characters' appearance and gender performance in the Deadwood Dick series provided insight into 19<sup>th</sup> century culture and society, as well as a critique on the social realities of the time, thus providing an apt reflection of the evolving American national character and the tensions present in 19<sup>th</sup> century American society (White, 1980).

The present analysis contributes to the body of textiles and apparel scholarship by demonstrating the ways in which the evolution and manipulation of gender (role) performance and appearance among fictional dime novel characters is reflective of the experiences of historical pioneer women of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, the present work demonstrates the usefulness of applying narrative inquiry to popular literature to glean meanings about dress and appearance. In the future, it would be beneficial to examine masculine appearance and gender performance, including cross-dressing in western dime novels, to gain a richer understanding of gender performativity on the western frontier. Further, it would be useful to expand the present work's use of narrative inquiry to a larger sample of dime novels, as the current work was limited by a rather small selection based on format, genre, and series. Although the sample size and scope of this research is not representative of all (western) dime novels, it provides a framework for further analysis.

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