



# Out in Public: Configurations of Women's Bodies in Nineteenth-Century America

*Alison Piepmeier*

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Images of the corseted, domestic, white middle-class female and the black woman as slave mammy or jezebel loom large in studies of nineteenth-century womanhood, despite recent critical work exploring alternatives to those images. In *Out in Public*, Alison Piepmeier focuses on women's bodies as a site for their public self-construction. Rather than relying on familiar binaries such as public/private and victim/agent, Piepmeier presents women's public embodiment as multiple, transitional, strategic, playful, and contested.

Piepmeier looks closely at the lives and works of actress and playwright Anna Cora Mowatt (1819-1871), Christian Science founder Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910), abolitionist and feminist orator Sojourner Truth (1797-1883), antilynching journalist Ida B. Wells (1862-1931), and *Godey's Lady's Book* editor Sarah Josepha Hale (1788-1879). Piepmeier's analysis of these women places their written documents in conjunction with salient cultural contexts, including freak shows, scientific writing, tall tales, and popular visual images of athletic women. By destabilizing and complicating traditional binary categories, Piepmeier makes culturally obscured or unreadable aspects of women's lives visible, offering a more complete understanding of nineteenth-century female corporeality.

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