Public Abstract
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The late 19th and early 20th century was a period of humor, photography, and rampant gender debates. This dissertation was founded on an attempt to make sense of a period in American history that was messy and confusing. The United States was going through a growth spurt that, at times, as been lost in the midst of growing pains. Few Art Historians have developed a solid body of work that discusses humor during this period in America, let alone the debates that struggled to place or recognize women in humor. Gender dynamics within photography were often contradictory and problematic when discussing a developing artistic medium that blended scientific innovation and creative vision. Yet, the thread that connects these two very ambiguous trends in the United States is gender. Women working within these modes of expression, (be-it humor, photography, or both as this dissertation suggests), find a freedom in the ambiguous.

Using cartoons from satirical magazines and mostly unpublished works of prominent female photographers, this dissertation unveils a gendered commentary on humor and popular culture representations of women. Hannah Maynard, Frances Benjamin Johnston, and Anne Brigman tactfully work to cultivate a public persona that contradicts and accentuates their subversive techniques and subject matter.