“PROPHETIC PINS”

SENTIMENT AND SENSATION IN LAYETTE PINCUSHIONS, 1760-1840

by

Lauren Bradshaw

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in American Material Culture

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ABSTRACT

In the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, layette pincushions were a common gift for expectant mothers either during pregnancy or just after the birth of the child. Created by a family member, friend, or neighbor, they would often be included as part of a layette set which is a collection of clothing and other items needed for the care of a newborn baby. Pins were heavily used by women in the eighteenth century for pinning babies' diapers, headgear, clothing, and swaddling. These objects were typically marked with the initials and birth date of the child and included phrases such as "Welcome Little Stranger" and "God Bless the Babe and May It Live." These words took on anticipatory and contingent significance as they would often be created before the birth of the child and would entirely shift in meaning if either the mother or the child did not survive the birth, which was a common occurrence during this era. As the messages and motifs are formed using the exposed pin heads as a design element, the aesthetic and sentimental value must be sacrificed by removing the pins to use them as fasteners.

The practice of materially marking initials and dates on domestic textile objects is rooted in the needlework practices that women would have learned at an early age, beginning with embroidery samplers. Layette pincushions exemplify the material skills and moral values that early needlework education instilled in women as well as directly representing the significance of their assigned roles as mothers. Throughout women's history the needle has been portrayed as both an instrument of suffering and reclamation as it represents the history of women's oppression but also their ability to transcend these prescribed roles and gain a greater degree of autonomy. Directly related to the needle, the

pin also contains a multitude of dualistic qualities. Opposed to the notions of care intended by these objects, layette pincushions also retain an inherent quality of violence. In addition to their ability to join or mend, pins can also cause pain, which was unfortunately a common occurrence for babies getting stuck with their own diaper pins prior to the invention of safety pins in 1849.

Due to their unique materiality and distinct function, layette pincushions are valuable historical repositories of eighteenth-century craft, culture, and maternal identity. Women in the eighteenth century continuously crafted textile objects by hand that are imbued with sentimental value and continue to serve as mnemonic devices to fill the absence of loss. Existing at the intersection of material culture, the history of emotions, sensory history, and women's history, this thesis seeks to draw out the relationships between the sensory experience and sentimental emotion of materially marking familial relationships with the shifting temporalities of anticipatory, commemorative, and memorial objects.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The utility of the pin has existed for as long as humans have felt the need to clothe their bodies. Small, pointed objects made of thorn and bone, intended to secure clothing, appeared as early as the Paleolithic period, and emerged in metal during the Bronze Age.[1] As these tiny objects are easily lost, societies developed a need for their containment and transportation. One such container arrived in the fourteenth century in the form of pin cases. Pincushions first appeared in the sixteenth century and continuously increased in popularity and variety into the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.[2] The pins contained by these cushions have a direct relationship to the body and to the materials that so intimately conceal, adorn, and sculpt the human figure in accordance with the ever-changing trends of fashion and necessity.[3]

Sticking pins into cushions as an intentional and aesthetic design technique emerged in seventeenth-century England as demonstrated by a rare 1652 pin-stuck

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[1] Mary C. Beaudry, *Findings: The Material Culture of Needlework and Sewing* (Yale University Press, 2006), 10-43.

[2] E.D. Longman and S. Loch, *Pins and Pincushions* (London: Longman, Green, & Co, 1911).

[3] Many authors and artists have written about the intimacy between textiles and the body but my first significant encounter with this concept was Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Fray: Art & Textile Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), 12.

cushion in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum.[4] Many of the earliest pin-stuck cushions do not appear to commemorate a particular event but serve as indicators of authorship or ownership.[5] This gesture of materially marking initials and dates on domestic textile objects is rooted in the needlework practices that women would have learned at an early age.[6] The cushions marking ownership were followed by those commemorating weddings in the early-to-mid eighteenth century.[7] Layette pincushions, specifically commemorating births, seem to have first appeared sometime between 1760 to 1770. These objects peaked in popularity in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and are the subject of this thesis.

Focusing on the repetitive physical actions of creating and using these domestic textile objects, I hope to draw out the relationships between the sensory experience and sentimental emotion of materially marking familial relationships with the shifting temporalities of anticipatory, commemorative, and memorial objects. I aim to position layette pincushions as ephemeral artifacts of motherhood that serve as material mediators of physical touch between mothers and infants as well as archives of maternal lineage

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[4] Unknown maker, 1652, satin with design in pins, 913-1907, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

[5] Early pin-stuck cushions would occasionally be dated with the maker or receiver's birthday (celebrating the anniversary of a birth rather than the initial birth.) More often, they were simply marked with the date of the object's creation, a similar practice to what is seen in embroidery samplers.

[6] Betty Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery: American Samplers & Pictorial Needlework, 1650-1850* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993).

[7] There are many examples of pin-stuck wedding cushions in the collection at Colonial Williamsburg and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

that transcend the temporal boundaries of a single human lifetime.[8] Women in the eighteenth century crafted textile objects by hand that are imbued with sentimental value and continue to serve as mnemonic devices[9] to recall a particular person, place, time, or even fill the absence of a loss.

Textile objects often become surrogates for the presence or physical touch of a loved one when they are no longer in close proximity. In the case of layette pincushions, this absence is uniquely complicated by the fact that the infant has not yet arrived. States of absence may be temporary or permanent and may shift an individual's affective response to objects. If the state of absence is temporary, the object may evoke a sense of yearning for the return or arrival of the loved one. The permanence of death causes the surrogate object to become a perpetual memorial. This was often the outcome of these objects when the infant died during or soon after childbirth. All textiles eventually become memorials due to our mortality and retain an intense emotional potency and intimacy with the body.

1.1 Historiography of Needlework as Material Culture

The historiography of my object research exists primarily at the intersection of material culture, the history of emotions[10], sensory history, and women's history. It is

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[8] As is the case with many other forms of domestic textiles, these objects were often passed down through maternal lineages and preserved long after the death of the original makers and receivers.

[9] Many authors and artists have written on textiles as mnemonic devices. I was recently influenced by Deborah McGuire, *'Remember Me': Domestic Textiles in Britain 1790–1890: Memory, Identity and Emotion* (Oxford Brookes University, 2022).

[10] A subfield at the junction of material culture and emotions history has emerged with three anthologies published within the last decade: Anna Moran and Sorcha O'Brien, eds., *Love Objects: Emotion, Design and Material Culture* (Bloomsbury, 2014); Jonas

true that men, and potentially those existing between the binary, also participated in sewing and needlework in the eighteenth century.[11] I intentionally choose to write through the binarized lens of women's history in this context as my aim is to consider the ways in which social constructs of femininity defined women as homemakers and caregivers in this period. Layette pincushions exemplify the material skills and moral values that early needlework education instilled in women as well as directly representing the significance of their assigned roles as mothers.

Although pin-sticking is a distinctly different physical action than sewing, these cushions were sewn before they could be stuck and the practice of marking names and dates on textile objects is deeply rooted in the material literacy and semiotic language of needlework. As the creation of textile objects relates so closely to the confines of domesticity, some early feminists have criticized it as being synonymous with the oppression of women.[12] Alternatively, scholarship over the last several decades has shifted to recognize the power of needlework as a means for self-sufficiency, creativity, and personal expression.[13]

Frykman and Maja Povrzanovic Frykman, eds., *Sensitive Objects: Affect and Material Culture* (Sweden: Nordic Academic Press, 2016); Sally Holloway et al., *Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions through History* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

[11] See Joseph McBrinn, *Queering the Subversive Stitch: Men and the Culture of Needlework* (Bloomsbury, 2021) and Joanne Begiato, *Manliness in Britain, 1760–1900 Bodies, Emotion, and Material Culture* (Manchester University Press, 2020).

[12] See Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: J. Johnson, 1792) and Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (London: T. Cadell Jun. & W. Davies, 1799).

[13] Rozsika Parker is often recognized for igniting this conversation in *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (Women's Press Limited, 1984),

An indispensable contribution to scholarship that centers women in material culture is the trilogy of anthologies edited by Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin.[14] The anthology, *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750–1950*, examines "just how deeply the needle has pierced social, political, economic, ethnic, and cultural facets of humanity, rendering it an extraordinarily valuable tool, and its associated material practices among the most important for human history."[15] This statement is a response to the frequently quoted line by Olive Schreiner: "Has the pen or pencil dipped so deep in the blood of the human race as the needle?"[16] Schreiner's inquiry articulates the duality of the needle as an instrument of both suffering and reclamation.

Additionally, in her contribution to the anthology, Goggin writes about an 1830 confessional sampler stitched by seventeen-year-old Elizabeth Parker which begins with the words "As I cannot write […]"[17] Elizabeth was a young woman that had faced a series of abuses and misfortunes in her life and stitched a forty-six-line confessional text, which includes accounts of sexual assault and suicidal ideation, in the material language of a plain-stitch embroidery sampler. This object is emotionally potent and visually

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which has been followed by an outpouring of contemporary scholarship on the relationship between textiles and gender identity.

[14] *Women and Things, 1750–1950: Gendered Material Strategies* (Routledge, 2009); *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750–1950* (Routledge, 2009); *Women and the Material Culture of Death* (Routledge, 2010).

[15] Maureen Daly Goggin, "Introduction: Threading Women," in *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750–1950* (Routledge, 2009), 1.

[16] Olive Schreiner, *From Man to Man* (London: Virago Press, 1982), 187.

[17] This object is now in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

striking as it has no other decorative motifs and appears only as a large block of stitched text in red thread.

Although Parker was too fearful to audibly speak or physically pen these words, she felt secure enough to express herself through the familiarity of this needlework practice. This is indicative that for women of this era, the needle, rather than the pen, was the material mediator between phenomenological experience and textual inscription, or what Goggin refers to as rhetorical praxis.[18]

1.2 Primary Sources and Methodologies

My central primary sources are the late-eighteenth to early-nineteenth-century layette pincushions that I have viewed and handled[19] at a multitude of cultural heritage institutions in the United States and in England. These include the Winterthur Museum in Delaware, the Woodford Mansion in Philadelphia, the Daughters of the American Revolution Museum in Washington, D.C., the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and the Discovery Museum in Newcastle upon Tyne. As this research focuses so closely on the sense of touch, I feel it is important that I hold these objects in my own hands and examine their surfaces with a proximity that cannot be achieved through a screen or

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[18] Maureen Daly Goggin, "An Essamplaire Essai on the Rhetoricity of Needlework Sampler-Making: A Contribution to Theorizing and Historicizing Rhetorical Praxis," *Rhetoric Review*, 21 (2009): 309–338.

[19] I was able to personally handle the objects at all of the following locations except for the Discovery Museum in Newcastle. Even there, the curator graciously let me visually examine these objects as closely as possible and handled them for me in any way that I requested.

purely optical iteration of an object. As someone with a background as a maker[20], haptically reading the materiality of an object is just as important as visual analysis.

Scholars have suggested the emergence of a new "embodied turn"[21] in academia, but bodily intuition between a skilled maker and their material has been understood by craftspeople for far longer. In 1965, master weaver Anni Albers described this kind of material knowledge as "tactile sensibility." She argued that the "qualities of the inner structure are as much part of a textile as are effects of outer tactile surface" and laments the fact that there is not a common term for the "tactile perception of such properties of material[s] . . . that can be observed by touch and are consequently not concerned with lightness or darkness."[22]

Almost a century prior, in 1888, Ernest Lefébure argued that the surface-based visual qualities of painting techniques differ from the needle's ability to penetrate through a ground fabric within needlework practice: "a superiority to the brush may be claimed for [the needle], since it can be made to produce work in relief."[23] These points support my experience that, as a maker working with craft materials, tactility is actually more valuable than vision. This is all to say that a tactile reading of these objects is very much a part of my methodology and gives me a greater understanding of the experiences of the makers and users of layette pincushions.

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[20] I have a decade of experience as an artist working with the craft-based materials and processes of ceramics and textiles.

[21] Hilary Davidson, "The Embodied Turn: Making and Remaking Dress as an Academic Practice," *Fashion Theory* 23 (2019): 329–362.

[22] Anni Albers, *On Weaving* (Wesleyan University Press, 1965), 62-65.

[23] Ernest Lefébure, trans. Alan S. Cole, *Embroidery and Lace* (London: H Grevel & Co., 1888).

Many of the primary sources that I used for this thesis research were introduced to me by the research archive of Susan Burrows Swan.[24] She was a former curator of the textiles collection at the Winterthur Museum and author of the frequently referenced publication, *Plain & Fancy: American Women and Their Needlework, 1700-1850*.[25] The archive of her incredibly thorough study of needlework and textiles is housed in the Winterthur Library and has been an essential source of information on the history of pin manufacture, pincushions in literary contexts, and first-hand accounts of makers and users of layette pincushions. Slide images of pincushions in her archive also led me to the whereabouts of some pincushions that I was able to visit in person such as those at the Daughters of the American Revolution Museum and the Woodford Mansion. Although I will never meet Susan Burrows Swan, I feel a responsibility to honor her legacy by perpetuating her research and knowledge through this thesis.

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[24] Susan Burrows Swan Papers, 1975-2001, Collection 725, Box 22, Folder 7: Pins & Pincushions, The Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera, Winterthur Library.

[25] Susan Burrows Swan, *Plain & Fancy: American Women and Their Needlework, 1700-1850* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1977) features needlework objects exclusively from the Winterthur collection and there have even been public museum tours designed around viewing the objects referenced in her publication.

Chapter 2

MATERIALITY, IDENTITY, AND MEMORY

Now commonly referred to as layette pincushions[26], these objects were created by a family member, friend, or neighbor and gifted to the mother either during her pregnancy or just after the birth of the child. They would often be included as part of a layette set which is a collection of clothing and other items needed for the care of a newborn baby. Pins were used daily by women in the eighteenth century for pinning babies' diapers, headgear, clothing, and swaddling.[27] This unique type of pincushion emerged as a gift that was seen as practical, commemorative, and potentially elegiac considering the high infant mortality rates of this period. Due to their uniquely constructed materiality and distinct function, layette pincushions are valuable historical repositories of eighteenth-century craft, culture, and maternal identity.

The disrupted surfaces of layette pincushions record the actions of motherhood with clusters of pin punctures and absences of pins within many of the design motifs. Pincushions are intended as transient homes for pins as these tiny fastening devices at once physically small but frequently used objects. Due to their portability, frequency of use, and relationship to caregiving, they are representative of the undervalued labor of

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[26] I have also encountered these objects being called maternity pincushions, child-bed cushions, Christening pillows, or baby's pillows in catalog entries, instruction manuals, or diaries.

[27] Beaudry, *Findings*, 14.

women in the eighteenth century.[28] Traditional needlework marking practices influence their materiality and form while their potential function celebrates the promise of motherhood. This chapter will demonstrate the ways in which the existence of these objects is rooted in the needlework education practices of eighteenth-century girls which contributed so strongly to the social construction of feminine and maternal ideals.

2.1 Material Literacy and Embodied Knowledge

Close-looking and the haptic perception of handling these objects of maternal intimacy in conjunction with my embodied knowledge as a maker has allowed me to gain insights into how exactly these objects were constructed by the hands of women in the eighteenth century. When I handle a hand-stitched object and analyze how it was constructed, the sensory memory of stitching is activated neurologically in my mind and physiologically in my fingertips. I can "feel"[29] the sensation of the needle puncturing the ground fabric and the tension of the thread as it passes through this membrane. It is important to me that I haptically inspect these objects in order to fully understand their unique methods of construction. The closer I can come to fully understanding the exact interactions between these makers and their materials, the closer I come to an accurate embodied understanding of making these objects and a more specific understanding of their unique materiality.

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[28] Peter Razzell and Christine Spence, "The History of Infant, Child and Adult Mortality in London, 1550–1850," *The London Journal 32* (2007): 271–92.

[29] The ambiguous duality of this word is intentional as it refers to both psychological and physiological experience.

Relating back to Anni Albers' concept of "tactile sensibility,"[30] Maureen Daly Goggin speaks of the "needle as an epistemic tool that exceeds the limits of an ocular focus."[31] This epistemology requires the skilled hand of the maker to develop what Goggin calls a "kinetic familiarity" with their materials as a means to gain both cognitive and bodily knowledge. I have described this same familiarity as "material intuition" which I have experienced as an ongoing dialogue with the material to which you are devoted. This leads to the ability to anticipate the behavior of the material in an attempt to control its reactions while still accepting inevitable fluctuations in process. The hand of a skilled maker leaves evidence of this bodily knowledge which can then lead to a better understanding of the material practices that went into its creation.

What I have gathered is that eighteenth-century layette pincushions vary greatly in their level of skill and craftsmanship, and in their complexity of form and composition. Some were clearly finished with seams and evidence of process exposed whereas others display pristine craftsmanship, attention to detail, and a maximal amount of decoration. It is often difficult to determine the identity of the maker because these objects typically would not be marked with the initials of the maker but of the anticipated or newly arrived infant.[32]

Makers of layette pincushions typically used multiple layers of fabric to create the shape and stuffed the fabric with sawdust or other materials to expand into a rectangular

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[30] Anni Albers, *On Weaving* (Wesleyan University Press, 1965), 62-65.

[31] Maureen Daly Goggin, "Introduction: Threading Women," in *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750–1950* (Routledge, 2009), 4.

[32] This can be confirmed by matching documented names and birthdates with those displayed on the pincushions.

or square form. Most contain around three layers of silk, cotton, or linen as well as other materials such as batting which add strength and durability to withstand the injury of repeated pin punctures. Various types of trims and tassels would then be added to the cushions including ribbons, cording, or lace.

Some cushions are trimmed with elaborate metalwork such as this 1777 cushion at the Winterthur Museum (fig. 1 & fig. 2). A cushion at the Woodford Mansion in Philadelphia is the only I have seen that uses pins as a design detail to cover the seams rather than leaving them exposed or covering them with some variety of textile trim material (fig. 3 & fig. 4). This could likely be an indicator of wealth as eighteenth-century pins were handmade and relatively expensive.[33] Including pins along the seams is not necessary for the overall design which suggests a financial ability to offer an abundance of pins to the new mother.

After the basic construction of the pincushion, text and motifs would be added to the surface by means of sticking pins into the cushions and having their exposed heads form the design. Some are double-sided, with designs and text in pins on both sides of the cushion, but a significant majority have a clearly dominant side and a back side containing few or no pins. The size of the cushions varies from being as small as 2” x 3” to measuring over 8” x 8”, with the majority falling at around 4” x 6”. Many retain a surprisingly substantial weight due to being filled with heavy sawdust or emery powder while those stuffed with straw or wool (fig. 5) are much lighter.

The majority of eighteenth-century layette pincushions are in relatively poor condition and have sustained enough wear that their multiple layers of fabric are exposed due to tears in the fabric or patches of severe thread loss. Additionally, thread loss near

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[33] Beaudry, *Findings.*

empty pinholes as well as insect damage allows me to visually access what material is inside most of the pincushions. Over time, the light and bouncy fibrous filling materials like wool or flannel retain their form while the heavily weighted cushions become flattened by gravity. Pins on the surface of the heavy cushions penetrate deeper into the granular materials like sawdust as the friction holds them in place. In contrast, the lighter materials resist gravity and the pins remain closer to the surface.

Prior to mechanization in the early-nineteenth century, pins were made individually by hand and required two separate pieces of drawn wire: one to create the shank and one to be coiled around the shank to form a head.[34] I have noticed that many of the larger sized hand-drawn wire pinheads appear to have been scraped with a tool to flatten their surface (fig. 6). The end point of the shaft which can be seen in the center of the head was often sharp and caught on clothing. This could be the reason for the filing down on the head of the pin although it is unclear why only the largest size pins feature this detail.

The difference in pin manufacture is significant to the overall appearance and specific visual characteristics of eighteenth-century layette pincushions. Similar versions of these cushions continued to be made through the mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth century but have a notably different appearance due to their flattened pinheads laying flush against the surface rather than creating a studded dimensionality. This can be seen in the comparison between these eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century pincushions which are exactly a century apart (fig. 7 & fig. 8).

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[34] Beaudry, *Findings.*

Although the Industrial Revolution drastically changed textile production on a large scale, the myth that this period eliminated craft is often exaggerated.[35] The shift from handmade to mechanized pins transitioned slowly over time but most cushions created after around 1850 no longer contain handmade pins.[36] Within the bounds of this research, the latest dated cushion I have found containing handmade rather than mechanized pins is an 1838 velvet cushion at the V&A (fig. 9). The earliest cushion I have found containing mechanized pins is also at the V&A and is dated 1862 (fig. 10).

Cushions created within the first half of the nineteenth century have much more uniformity in their structure and design than eighteenth century cushions. However, variation in fabric colors can be seen in many cushions made in the second half of the nineteenth century such as this green cushion (fig. 11). It is possible that some earlier cushions have faded over time and began as a different color, but the majority from the eighteenth century seem to have been created in a cream-colored satin.

Nineteenth-century cushions are much more difficult to date as they often do not bear initials or dates like the earlier eighteenth-century cushions. The removal of the initials and dates from the design also detaches these objects from the needlework tradition of marking. At this point in time, these objects were no longer needed for their functionality and instead feel like an homage to past traditions. Giving one of these objects as a gift even though it is no longer functional demonstrates that these matrilineal care networks served a purpose that went beyond functionality and symbolized the solidarity of women.

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[35] Glenn Adamson, "Learn Trades or Die," in *Craft: An American History* (Bloomsbury, 2021), 77-113.

[36] Based on my personal research of looking through dozens of digital collections databases.

Based on my experience of viewing and handling these objects, I believe that distinct patterns or written instructions on how to construct cushions specifically intended for sticking did not yet exist in the eighteenth century. This is significant because it demonstrates the results of skills learned exclusively through the direct transference of material knowledge and skill from one female maker to another. There are endless discrepancies within the materials and methods used in the creation of eighteenth-century layette pincushions which leads me to believe that standard patterns were not typically used.

There is also variation in the space between the pinheads with some cushions featuring pins that are in such proximity that they touch as well as cushions containing pins that are placed quite a distance apart (fig. 12). This may have been an unconscious action, but I also feel it could indicate necessary frugality in that fewer pins used would be less cost to the maker. Some layette pincushions retain traces of what appears to be graphite underneath the pins which indicate that some women did plan out their design in two dimensions before articulating it in pins (fig. 13).

This same practice of planning the design in graphite can be seen beneath the embroidery stitches of some eighteenth-century samplers. The visual characteristics of traditional cross-stitched letters are the result of the grid which is inherent to textile materiality. Woven fabric is formed by a grid of threads, therefore the easiest way to form a distinct point on its surface is to pull the threaded needle up through the fabric and back down again at a diagonal. Similar to pixels on a digital image, these stitches form letters and motifs within the grid of the fabric rather than using the continuous strokes seen in typical handwriting in ink. In the nineteenth century, women began to incorporate italicized cursive into their needlework and pin-sticking. This style of lettering became increasingly popular in the nineteenth century, but it essentially ignores the grided weave

structure of the fabric and therefore subverts the linen grid as the historical foundation of needlework.

An unusual cushion at the Discovery Museum in Newcastle, England appears to have been covered with a layer of netting before the pins were pushed into place (fig. 14). The circular holes and consistent spacing may have been used as a guide to form the italicized cursive lettering without gaps or overlapping of the pinheads. A similar cushion in the Winterthur Museum collection bears a message in the form of italicized cursive handwriting surrounded by a floral border with no date or initials (fig 15). Several cushions of this style exist but are unfortunately more difficult to date due to the fact that they are not marked. In my view, removing the initials from the design also defeats the purpose of commemoration. The specific date and initials of the infant are crucial to the genealogy and temporality of the objects and feel far more significant than the simple phrases with floral boarders.

Removing the practice of marking and cross-stitching from the process of creating layette pincushions dissolves their attachment to historical needlework methodologies and therefore distances them from eighteenth-century conceptions of feminine identity. Susan Klepp has observed a shift in the language surrounding pregnancy beginning in the late-eighteenth century which coincides with "a profound reconfiguration of women's construction of the fecund possibilities of their bodies." Nineteenth-century women ultimately detached the form from its historical praxis of needlework which coincided with nineteenth-century changes in expectations of maternal behavior and identity.[37]

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[37] Susan Klepp, "Revolutionary Bodies: Women and the Fertility Transition in the Mid-Atlantic Region, 1760-1820," *The Journal of American History* (1998).

The evidence shows that the prevalence of patterns took over demonstration and embodiment as skill-building tools by the mid-nineteenth century. Interestingly, this shift coincides with a significant decline in needlework skill levels.[38] Considered in this way, I suggest that the earlier eighteenth-century cushions have a stronger attachment to histories of femininity, domesticity, community, and caregiving. They are indicative of feminized labor, embodied pedagogy, and the ways in which they intertwine amongst the formation of matrilineal care networks.

In searching for when patterns first emerged, I consulted the women's periodical, *The Lady's Magazine*, which was published monthly from 1770 to 1847 and included one pattern in each issue. I have identified patterns for pincushions intended for a layette set, but they are all intended for embroidery rather than pin-sticking. Patterns intended for embroidery could have been used or at least provided inspiration for pin-stuck cushions as can been seen in the similarities between embroidery patterns and cushion motifs.

By contrast, patterns designed specifically for pin-stuck cushions do appear in the later nineteenth-century women's periodical, *The Godey's Lady's Book*, which ran from 1830 through 1898. A 1857 example and the corresponding text support my findings that earlier cushions likely were not created from patterns for it states that "the article in question being almost always a present from youthful friends, and difficulty being so often experienced to find pretty designs and an appropriate motto, we have thought it quite within our duty to give instructions for making the pincushion."[39] It goes on to

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[38] Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*.

[39] Godey's Lady's Book, August 1857. Retrieved from https://coilink.org/20.500.12592/h9w1202 on 14 Apr 2025. COI: 20.500.12592/h9w1202.

describe how the cushion may be executed in either beads or pins, and that the motto could be changed to fit the maker's needs.

Another crucial point in these instructions is the detail that the pins must be added "after the pincushion is made up."[40] Using pin-sticking rather than embroidery stitches to decorate the surface of a pincushion interestingly disrupts the typical construction sequence of these objects. An embroidered cushion would require the fabric to be embroidered first, the pieces sewn together, and then stuffed with material. Due to the penetration of the sharp pins through the fabric, pin-stuck cushions could not be decorated in pins until the overall construction of the cushion was completed. It would be nearly impossible to pre-stick the fabric, then sew it together, and attempt to push the stuffing material into the cushion and past the pins without being stuck.

There is a uniquely constructed pincushion at the DAR Museum that has only three rather than four seams along the edges of the object (fig. 16). This indicates that one cut of fabric was folded in half and sewn together rather than two individual pieces sewn together. Additionally, this cushion has unusually deflated corners which led me to the realization that there is a smaller form contained within the larger form creating a barrier and preventing the stuffing material from reaching the outermost layer of fabric and inflate the corners. This error in construction method could be the result of an individual attempting to make one of these objects without physical and verbal instruction from an experienced instructor.

Overall, the evidence indicates that prior to the nineteenth century, these objects were created using needlework references embedded within the embodied material knowledge passed between female makers. In reference to embodiment, Beth Fowkes

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[40] Ibid.

Tobin discusses the ways in which "this kind of learning . . . occurs when the learner is embedded within a community of practice . . . where the embodied practices of the artisan are visible, and learning is based on observation and imitation."[41]

Differing so greatly in process to the practice of decorating a cushion with embroidery, and featuring handmade rather than mechanized pins, eighteenth century pin-stuck cushions are a unique class of objects. They retain a specific materiality that is tethered to a time when ingenuity and craftsmanship reigned over technology and automated processes.

2.2 Performing Femininity in Domestic Craft

The typical trajectory of an eighteenth-century girl's needlework education represented major life transitions such as girlhood to womanhood, marriage to domesticity, pregnancy to motherhood, and the mourning of death. The historiography of textile scholarship on embroidery samplers as needlework education for young English and American girls is particularly rich and helps to contextualize the importance of layette pincushions.

Former curator of textiles at the Winterthur Museum, Susan Burrows Swan, published *A Winterthur Guide to American Needlework*[42] in 1976 and *Plain & Fancy:*

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[41] Beth Fowkes Tobin, "Learning to Craft" in *Material Literacy in 18th-Century Britain: A Nation of Makers*, eds. Serena Dyer and Chloe Wigston Smith. (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 257-274.

[42] Susan Burrows Swan, *A Winterthur Guide to American Needlework* (Crown Publishers, 1976).

American Women and Their Needlework, 1700-1850[43] in 1977. In the latter publication, which serves as a chronological glimpse into the life of a typical middling or elite white woman in early America, Swan reveals that "even before a girl could grasp the assumption that a woman needed to be married, her upbringing was working to ensure that she would be. From at least the age of five until she married, her education consisted [of] the traits that would make her appealing to a protective husband, and a good wife and mother."[44] Images of objects from the Winterthur collection are included throughout the publication to materially exemplify the stages of a woman's life through her dedication to textile craft.

Independent scholar and collector Betty Ring also made major contributions to this field in 1993 with what is widely seen as the most comprehensive publication on needlework education, *Girlhood Embroidery: American Samplers & Pictorial Needlework, 1650-1850*. Ring stated that her aim in this scholarship was to "direct attention. . . to the long-forgotten educators of one half of the population of early America [by] presenting tangible evidence of their endeavors."[45] Similarly, I hope that in the following I can provide material testimony of eighteenth-century motherhood and the bonds of solidarity that women formed through the creation, distribution, and use of domestic textiles including layette pincushions.

In their needlework education, girls began with a simple marking or alphabet sampler, then moved on to practical skills such as mending, and eventually samplers full

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[43] Susan Burrows Swan, *Plain & Fancy: American Women and Their Needlework, 1700-1850* (Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1977).

[44] Swan, *Plain & Fancy*, 14.

[45] Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, xviii.

of both verses and motifs. Samplers often recorded events of birth and death such as in genealogical samplers and mourning pictures. These objects indicate the complex ways in which expectations of femininity in conjunction with the realities of loss were exemplified by the creation of domestic textiles.

This pedagogical practice is ultimately what led to women's material literacy in needle and thread and the skills needed to create layette pincushions. Many of the motifs and letter formations on these pincushions are derived directly from the semiotics of needlework and contain messages spelled out with each pin head replacing one stitch to form the individual letters of the text.[46] These objects uniquely extend the repetitious practice of marking textiles from exclusively stitching to include pin-sticking.

Published in 1894 with an introduction by historian Alice Morse Earle, *The Diary of Anna Green Winslow: A Boston School Girl of 1771*, describes the creation of one of these objects in her December 30, 1771 entry: "My aunt stuck a white satin pincushion for Mrs. Waters. On one side, is a flowered vine, on the reverse, just under the border are, on one side stuck these words, Josiah Waters, then follows on the end, Dec 1771, on the next side & end are the words, Welcome Little Stranger."[47] This entry offers the important detail that this pincushion was made one day after the birth of the child as Josiah Waters was born on December 29, 1771.

The aunt she writes of is Sarah Deming, the sister of her father, whom she was sent to live with at the age of ten with the intention of learning domestic skills including practical sewing and fancy needlework. As she watched her aunt stick this cushion, she

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[46] Many of the pincushions display letters in the same grid format as embroidery samplers, with one pin head standing in for one cross stitch to form text or motifs.

[47] Anna Green Winslow, ed. Alice Morse Earle, *The Diary of Anna Green Winslow: A Boston School Girl of 1771* (Applewood Books, 1997).

learned the skills to make one of her own, demonstrating the transference of material knowledge between female makers as an extension of the relationship between social constructs of femininity and needlework education. Anna sadly did not live long enough to be gifted one of these pincushions; she died in 1779 at the age of twenty without bearing any children of her own.

Sarah Deming's diary has also been transcribed, most notably including a harrowing account of escaping the city with her enslaved maid, Lucinda, during the 1775 Siege of Boston.[48] Anna was fond of Lucinda and wrote of her often in her diary, mentioning that she spun linen to knit socks for Lucinda, and that Lucinda was an accomplished musician. Anna's original diary contains a piece of burgundy fabric pressed between two pages and labeled "A piece of Lucinda's dress. She is mentioned in the diary and was a slave."[49] It is not in Anna's handwriting and was clearly added later. There is an abundance of available information about the life of Anna Green Winslow while almost nothing of Lucinda has been preserved.

A lack of information such as this exemplifies what Saidiya Hartman has called the "violence of the archive." This refers not only to inherent archival gaps but also to the fact that on the rare occasion enslaved individuals are represented in the archive, it is most often documenting an act of violence against those individuals.[50] As Chloe Wigston

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[48] Sarah Winslow Deming, 1775 journal entry, transcribed by Massachusetts Historical Society, https://www.masshist.org/database/1898 .

[49] Smith College Library Finding Aid, https://findingaids.smith.edu/agents/people/50655.

[50] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1-14.

Smith states, “collections of needlework from the long eighteenth century reflect the archival absences produced by the slave trade and white supremacy.”[51]

Layette pincushions were likely made exclusively by middling and elite white women in eighteenth-century England and early America. As I am contextualizing these objects within the history of eighteenth-century embroidery samplers, I want to clarify that Black girls and women did participate in needlework in the eighteenth century. While it is possible that no women of color made layette pincushions in the eighteenth century, it is completely false to assume that they did not practice needlework beyond plain sewing.

While the majority of samplers created and housed in museums were made by privileged white girls and women, there exist a small number of samplers made by Black girls and women, a few of which are housed at the Winterthur Museum. In her groundbreaking essay on these samplers, Kelli Barnes states that these “idealized visions of white women . . . only tell part of the story of domestic work in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.”[52] Entanglements of race, class, and gender are foundational to understanding the formation of “feminine” as a category in the eighteenth century, as this socially constructed identity was most often reserved for those who exemplified the projected ideals of whiteness, ablebodiedness, a higher class status, and the ability to bear and raise children as well as perform the labor of domestic care.

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[51] Chloe Wigston Smith, *Novels, Needleworks, and Empire: Material Entanglements in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World*, (Yale University Press, 2024), 80.

[52] Kelli Racine Barnes, “Schoolgirl Embroideries & Black Girlhood in Antebellum Philadelphia.” Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings, 2021. https://doi.org/10.32873/unl.dc.tsasp.0086.

2.3 Utility, Ephemerality, and Preservation

These pincushions embody a multitude of tactile and temporal modalities including the innate ephemerality of their design. As the messages and motifs are formed utilizing the exposed heads of pins as a design element, the aesthetic and sentimental value must be sacrificed by mothers grasping the pin heads and sliding them from their points of origin that were carefully placed by the hands of the attentive maker. Hopeful messages such as "Welcome Little Stranger" or "God Bless the Babe and May It Live," take on anticipatory and contingent significance as they would often be created before the birth of the child[53] and would entirely shift in meaning if either the mother or the child did not survive the birth, which was a common occurrence during this era.

The period from conception to childbirth was a series of agonizing uncertainties for women in the eighteenth century. The initial state of uncertainty was to determine whether or not the woman was actually pregnant which was difficult to diagnose due to the lack of modern technology. Even after the physical health of the mother and child were somewhat stabilized, "physiological changes of the mother and the introduction of a new child into the household"[54] caused major shifts in the daily life of an eighteenth-century mother.

In *'Uncertain Blessings': Pregnancy, Birth, and Early Child-Care in Eighteenth-Century America,* M. Michelle Jarrett states that "married women of child-bearing age spent their lives in a state of almost continual expectation." This is demonstrated

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[53] Often these pincushions would be given as gifts during pregnancy, but they were also sometimes created after the birth which is indicated by the cushions with exact months and days listed instead of solely the year.

[54] M. Michelle Jarrett, "'Uncertain Blessings': Pregnancy, Birth, and Early Child-Care in Eighteenth-Century America," MA Thesis: University of Delaware, 1997, 14.

materially by eighteenth-century women's garments as they often consisted of "a gown which women wrapped around their bodies and then pinned into a central panel or stomacher. As a woman's abdomen expanded, she might enlarge the dress by pinning her gown so as to expose more of the stomacher."[55] Maternal contingency was quite literally stitched and pinned straight into the garments of eighteenth-century women.

The contingent nature of pregnancy likely influenced the oddly detached language found on the pincushions such as "Welcome Little Stranger." Many scholars have speculated on the reason for words such as "stranger" that may feel unwelcoming to us today. Joanne Begiato posits that the "shared emotional language" of these seemingly cold phrases served as a means to "navigate the transition of pregnancy from one state to another and helped neutralise the fear of the arrival of an unseen stranger."[56] Some scholars have theorized that eighteenth-century parents attempted to limit their affection for infants during pregnancy and shortly after the birth as this is when newborns were most vulnerable to death.[57]

Although mourning mothers were often encouraged to find "consolation . . . in a humble Resignation to God's all perfect will," their internalized grief is recorded in diary entries such as a 1781 entry by Lowry Wister after losing her three-year-son to smallpox. She reflects on the last moments of his life describing them as "truly and sorrowfully

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[55] Jarrett, "Uncertain Blessings," 11.

[56] Joanne Begiato, '"Breeding" a "little stranger": managing uncertainty in pregnancy in later Georgian England', in *Perceptions of Pregnancy from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jennifer Evans and Ciara Meehan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 13–33.

[57] Begiato, Breeding a "little stranger."

painful to him and the reflections upon them at this day are so truly afflicting and distressing to me his sorrowing mother that I cannot commit them to writing."[58]

In addition to the contingency of survival, the meaning of some cushions shifted after birth due to a discrepancy in the parents' desires and the physiological characteristics of the infant. Although it was impossible to determine the biological sex of the child before the birth, some layette pincushions reveal the dominating preference for a male child. A pincushion created for a 1768 birth bears the message "Luck in a Lad" despite the object being created before the arrival of the child. Longman and Loch state that this cushion included a matching tablecloth, both of which were placed on the family table just before the birth.[59] In the event that such a cushion preceded the birth of a female child, its inaccuracy becomes a memorial of socially constructed gender hierarchy rather than a celebration of life. I feel it is deeply ironic that the desire for a male child is articulated with materials and processes so closely associated with the labor of women. A cushion created for a male child also defies the matrilineal associations of a cushion created for a female child as a man would likely have no interest in the ownership of objects celebrating his birth.

A pincushion within the DAR Museum collection intended for Elizabeth Rea Rhodes also reflects this bias when viewed in conjunction with a letter by her father announcing her arrival to her grandfather. It reads: "My Peggy [Margaret Francis] this morning made me a Present of a fine Baby [Peggy Shippen], which tho' of the worst Sex,

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[58] Lucia McMahon "'So Truly Afflicting and Distressing to Me His Sorrowing Mother': Expressions of Maternal Grief in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia." *Journal of the Early Republic* 32, no. 1 (2012): 27–60.

[59] Longman and Loch, *Pins and Pincushions*.

is yet entirely welcome."[60] The cushion, commemorating the 1786 birth of Elizabeth Rea Rhodes, is a common rectangular form in cream colored satin. It is double-sided with one side spelling out the common phrase, "Welcome Little Stranger," (fig. 17) and the opposite side displaying the date and initials "E.R. July 7 1786." (fig. 18)

It seems to have been preserved for commemorative purposes as the vast majority of the pins remain undisturbed in their original locations. A few areas have become threadbare over time and the cushion has only managed to retain three out of its original four ribbon tassels. Unlike so many of the children memorialized by these objects, Elizabeth Rea Rhodes was fortunate to live a long and full life as she passed away in 1872 at the age of eighty-six. As is the case with many of these objects, the pincushion descended down a matrilineal path and was donated to the museum by a female descendant, Ada Augusta Rhodes, in 1887.[61]

In her 2016 essay, "Marking and Memory: An Embroidered Sheet in the Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum," Antonia Brodie explains the motivations of individuals donating objects such as this to museums even though the objects may be dear to them, stating that "a museum presents a fitting repository for such items, providing a secure home and the promise that the donation will continue to be cared for and valued."[62]

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[60] Elizabeth Donaghy Garrett, *The Arts of Independence: The DAR Museum Collection*, (National Society, Daughters of the American Revolution, 1985), 72.

[61] Garrett, DAR catalog.

[62] Antonia Brodie, "Marking and Memory: An Embroidered Sheet in the Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum." *TEXTILE* 14 (2016): 160–75.

Chapter 3

TOUCH, CARE, AND EMOTION

Layette pincushions retain material traces of maternal touch and represent transitory moments in the lives of both mothers and their infants as well as the formative bonds created by their sensory exchanges. Historically and materially, they exemplify a unique sense of touch in their creation and design, and in their function and symbolism, as well as a connection to the formations of feminine identity within eighteenth-century needlework practice. Their scarred surfaces serve as a kind of haptic repository for the caretaking actions of a young mother, leaving a mark almost as a form of punctuation every time a pin is removed or returned.

In their totality, these objects document the passing of material knowledge through maternal lineages and serve as keepers of haptic memory that survive the cycles of birth and death. While the layette pincushion's overt function has a direct relationship to the tasks of mothering, it also serves as a reminder of intergenerational preservation that has allowed for their sustained existence is an extensional gesture of care.[63]

3.1 Histories of Gendered Sensory Hierarchy

Surrounding the social position of women in the eighteenth century, there is a distinct triangulation between women as child-bearers, their sense of touch as it relates to

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[63] There is evidence in museum provenance information that many of these objects were passed down through several matrilineal generations before eventually being gifted to the museum by a descendant.

care, and the relationship of domestic textiles to both touch and care. As Judith Walzer Leavitt states in her 1988 book, *Brought to Bed: Childbearing in America 1750 – 1950,* childbearing created a "cultural division of labor based on these biological distinctions, a division that allocated the domestic sphere to women and the public sphere to men."[64]

The preparation of textiles for a newborn was considered such indispensable maternal behavior that "Pennsylvania law stipulated a woman could not be convicted of infanticide if she had a set of childbed linen ready for her baby,"[65] on the grounds that stitching would be too arduous of an activity for a woman not intending to keep her child. Pregnancy and childcare are so tied to the materiality of textiles that evidence of dedication to needlework practice could be enough to absolve a woman of murder. Textile objects were symbolic of a woman's touch and their creation indicated the mother's anticipation and intention to provide care for the infant.

Building on this, historian Constance Classen explains that the "feminine sensory sphere" included touch, taste, and smell. These were the senses related to domestic labor and caring for others, while the senses of sight and sound were considered more masculine as they related to a supposedly rational, orderly, categorization of the world. In Classen's view, discrimination against women stemmed from a subversion of these prescribed uses of the senses for purposes of domestic labor. As she states, non-conforming women "defied sensory and social norms by using the feminine senses of

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[64] Judith Walzer Leavitt, *Brought to Bed: Childbearing in America 1750 – 1950*. (Oxford University Press, 1988), 3.

[65] Jarrett, "Uncertain Blessings", 13.

touch, taste and smell as media for self-gratification, rather than self-sacrifice, and as avenues for empowerment, rather than instruments of service."[66]

Recent scholarship conducted primarily by women has begun to "deconstruct sedimented and uncritical feminized assumptions regarding women and their needle, and in the process, recoup[ed] women's participation in meaningful, epistemic constructions."[67] This ongoing discussion was largely stimulated by Roszika Parker's groundbreaking 1984 book, *The Subversive Stitch*, in which she articulates the ways that embroidery became synonymous with femininity. Building upon this lineage of scholarship, Chloe Wigston Smith explains that the prescriptive motifs and structures within needlework practices have "frequently been read as emblematic of cultural and artistic oppression."[68] However, as Smith explains, many artists and interpreters have "sought to revive some of the imaginative possibilities and political potential of the sampler."[69] Thus understood as a means and end of female self-expression, the critical consensus today understands women to be able to use the materiality of their own confinement as a means to subvert their oppression and regain some form of autonomy.

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[66] Constance Classen, "The Witch's Senses: Sensory Ideologies and Transgressive Femininities from the Renaissance to Modernity." In *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, ed. David Howe. (Routledge, 2021), 70-84.

[67] Goggin, "Threading Women," 2.

[68] Smith, *Novels, Needleworks, and Empire*, 79.

[69] Ibid.

3.2 Handmaking and Gift-Giving as Emotional Care

Anticipating the material and emotional needs of an expectant mother, the maker of a layette pincushion fundamentally performed a labor of emotional care. As she stitched the seams closed and stuck a message of hope in pins, perhaps she recollected her own past pregnancy, yearned for her own child, or even mourned a loss. Reciprocally, as the receiver used the gift, either as functional or commemorative, she may have reflected on her relationship with its maker and felt supported by her creative actions. Whether they are handled by the maker or the user of the cushion, "each pin bears a woman's touch, as it was pushed individually into a precise space without tearing the fabric."[70]

A closer examination of these crafting and gift-giving practices can provide a greater appreciation for and understanding of the "economies of emotional and tactile exchange between elite women, and the potency of crafting as affective work."[71] There has been much attention given to the floral decoupage work of eighteenth-century artist and writer Mary Delany but much less focus on her other skills such as shellwork, needlework, and pin-sticking. Written correspondence from Mary Delany to Mrs. Anne Granville in 1729 describes the creation of a layette pincushion: "Mrs. Dashwood junior is as well as can be expected considering her condition; I have got her pincushion to stick

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[70] Sally Holloway, "'Materializing Maternal Emotions': Birth, Celebration, and Renunciation in England, c.1688–1830," in Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway, and Sarah Randles (eds), *Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions through History,* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

[71] Madeleine Pelling, "Crafting Friendship: Mary Delany's Album and Queen Charlotte's Pocketbook," *Journal18* (October 2018), https://www.journal18.org/2909.

for her."[72] According to her letter, after describing the uncomfortable physical state of Mrs. Dashwood's pregnancy, she comments on preparing a pincushion for the "nursing toilette."[73] This indicates that Mary Delany views the creation and giving of this gift as a reaction to the pain of Mrs. Dashwood, and therefore as a form of compassion and care. Not only did she perform this act of physical labor as emotional care, but she also documented her actions in correspondence, which reinforces its importance within this matrilineal care network.

3.3 Pins, Pincushions, Superstition, and Pain

Opposed to the notions of care intended by these objects, layette pincushions also retain a quality of violence. Pins are capable of causing pain, which was unfortunately a common occurrence for babies getting stuck with their own diaper pins in the eighteenth century. Safety pins were not invented until 1849 and became increasingly available in the following decades.[74] An 1860 diary entry by Caroline Richards interestingly focuses on the absence rather than the presence of pins as a means to determine the needs of an unsettled infant. She describes a mother she is visiting as having "the nurse sew the baby's clothes on every morning,"[75] rather than pinning, so that she could more easily

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[72] Mary Delany and Augusta Hall, *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany* (London: R. Bentley, 1862).

[73] This is the term that is used to describe this type of object in the footnotes of Mary Delany's published correspondence.

[74] Longman and Loch, *Pins and Pincushions*.

[75] Sewing the garments onto an infant was not an uncommon practice in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I have found numerous accounts of this in eighteenth and nineteenth-century correspondence and diaries.

determine the needs of the baby by ruling out the possibility that the child was crying in pain after being stuck with diaper or clothing pins.[76]

Swaddling bands, also intended as a form of care, were shown to cause bodily harm to infants as well. Newborns would be tightly bound by these narrow lengths of cloth from their shoulders to their feet with their arms pinned to their sides. Although this practice seems cruel today, women in the eighteenth century were led to believe that an infant "must be swaddled to give his little body a straight figure . . . to keep upon his feet, for else he would go upon all fours as most other animals do."[77]

This practice eventually dissipated in the late-eighteenth century as physicians realized the consequences of confining infants so tightly that it impeded proper development of the body. There were also concerns about the psychological effects of this practice. For example, Jean Jacques Rousseau lamented in 1762 that "the child has hardly left the mother's womb, it has hardly begun to move and stretch its limbs, when it is given new bonds."[78] Many felt that the inability to explore their surroundings would have a profound negative impact on the child.

By the nineteenth century, a more common understanding emerged recognizing that pins were a dangerous solution to diapering and that swaddling with pins was not recommended. Dr. William Buchan states in the 1804 publication, *Domestic Medicine*, that it would be safer to "fasten the clothes of an infant with strings than pins" and describes having found pins penetrating over "half an inch into the body of a child."[79]

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[76] Garrett, *The Arts of Independence*.

[77] Jarrett, "Uncertain Blessings," 18.

[78] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education* (1763).

[79] William Buchan, *Domestic Medicine* (1804).

Even after the advent of the safety pin, infants continued to be occasionally stuck due to some remaining imperfections in the design and lower quality of materials. The horrific idea of accidentally injuring an infant was used to market higher quality safety pins. This is made apparent by an 1893 advertisement from *Nursing Notes*[80] that asks the reader "Why make baby cry?" The ad goes on to boast that "Goodman's Royal Silver Safety Pins" will not rust, bend, or unfasten due to the superiority of their material.

There was also the superstition "more pins, more pain"[81] or "for every pin, a pain" in which mothers feared that if they received the gift before the birth that there would be an increase in labor pains which allegedly sometimes led to the removal of all pins and therefore the ironic destruction of the commemorative design. This fear of labor pains feels justified as women were often denied the few anesthetics that were available at that time for providing them with at least minimal relief.[82] This deprivation was not due to any understanding or fear of harm to the infant but was informed by the biblical statement in the Book of Genesis that say "in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children."[83]

Historically, pins have commonly been viewed as both a protective object to ward off evil as well as a harmful tool to carry out evil or seek revenge. Longman and Loch describe the practice of creating a clay or wax figure of an individual that the maker wished to harm and then sticking the figure with pins in the belief that this would cause

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[80] *Nursing Notes: a Practical Journal for Nurses,* Midwives Chronicle: The Heritage Blog of the Royal College of Midwives, https://rcmheritage.wordpress.com/category/library-collections/.

[81] Longman and Loch, *Pins and Pincushions*, 25.

[82] Swan, *Plain & Fancy*, 28-30.

[83] Swan, Plain & Fancy, 28.

that individual bodily pain.[84] Chloe Wigston Smith also positions the needle as an instrument with which to carry out "women's violent revenge upon men" as they attempted to defend themselves from sexual assault and other harassment. The bodkin, a thick and blunt needle, was used to "puncture and wound, but its eye gave it an equal ability to join materials together."[85] In contrast to injury, pins were also believed to treat or cure various diseases as well as prevent bad dreams or bad luck.

In his semi-autobiographical 1850 novel, *David Copperfield*, Charles Dickens writes "my mother was sitting by the fire, but poorly in health, and very low in spirits, looking at it through her tears, and desponding heavily about herself and the fatherless little stranger, who was already welcomed by some grosses of prophetic pins, in a drawer upstairs, to a world not at all excited on the subject of his arrival . . ." which is followed by "Bless the Baby! exclaimed Miss Betsey, unconsciously quoting the second sentiment of the pincushion in the drawer upstairs."[86] In this situation, "prophetic pins" seem to take on a dual meaning in that the pincushion is announcing the expected birth of the child as well as foreshadowing the potential birthing pains the mother may experience and her difficulties as a single mother.

Pins offer a multitude of curious physical and metaphorical dualities including their ability to join or mend in contrast to their ability to puncture or harm. A material example of this can be seen within the degradation of a layette pincushion that resides

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[84] This practice can also be contextualized within the culturally universal tendency to relate corporeal sensation with various ritualistic objects such as amulets, reliquaries, and effigies

[85] Chloe Wigston Smith, "Bodkin Aesthetics: Small Things in the Eighteenth Century" in *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, no. 2 (Winter 2018-19).

[86] Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (Sheldon, 1863).

within the textiles collection at Winterthur. It is a small rectangular pincushion with a large central heart motif and text in pins that reads “GOD BLESS THE BABE” with the initials “A. M. M.” and a date of 1777.” (fig. 19 & fig. 20)

This pincushion has endured a substantial amount of thread loss to the extent that the top layer of fabric is almost entirely threadbare. The only remaining evidence of the exterior cloth is fragmented but securely held in place directly by the penetration of the pins. Although they initially caused damage by piercing the fabric during the creation process, paradoxically their functionality as fasteners is what has allowed for the survival of a relatively intact object.

Another eighteenth-century layette pincushion at the DAR Museum has led me to the realization that the length of the pins is significant in terms of their ability to contain the fabric for a sustained period of time. The pins placed into these cushions vary drastically in the size of their pinheads and the length of their shafts. This pincushion (fig. 21) contains small pins with exceptionally short shanks as can be seen by the those remaining around the edges of the object. All of the pins have been either intentionally removed or unintentionally dislodged at some point in time. The top layer of fabric is entirely worn away on the central area that is bare of pins while the fabric layer remains intact on the edges where the pins have stayed in place. This pincushion shows the consequences to fabrics when pins are not present or long enough to secure the multiple layers together for centuries.

3.4 Affective Objects and Attachment

In my view, affect is the link between sensory experience and emotion. The tactile experience of an object tied to memory creates an affective response as a specific combination of emotions. There exists a unique convergence of tenderness and pain that

emerges from anticipation, absence, or loss of a loved one. I feel that this complex combination of emotions can most accurately be described as sentiment and originates from attachment between individuals. This form of attachment is particularly intense within the bond between a mother and child. Smith states that "marking was fundamentally a feminine material practice in which the commonplace tasks of household management met more symbolic functions of naming and placing. This included the marking of emotional attachments between mothers and infants."[87]

I find this idea of attachment to be synonymous with the way that I think about affect, in that affect and attachment both create bonds between objects and emotions. Eighteenth-century girls consistently observed women forming bonds and documenting events through the creation of domestic textiles and imitated this behavior throughout their lifetime. Mark-marking and gift-giving practices were the response to every prompt for celebration or mourning.

One of the few objects as intimate as a layette pincushion to exemplify the loss of maternal identity in conjunction with the loss of the child is a foundling token. In early-eighteenth-century London, The Foundling Hospital was established as a means for mothers to surrender infants that they were unable to care for, often due to poverty or perceived illegitimacy. Small mementos were left by the mothers with their infants so that the child could be recognized and reclaimed later if circumstances changed. These immensely sentimental objects, now kept at the Foundling Museum, are referred to as foundling tokens and include a variety of textile and needlework-related objects, most notably a thimble and a sampler fragment.

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[87] Smith, *Novels, Needleworks, and Empire*, 74.

In her essay on the sampler fragment, Sally Holloway provides an analysis of how its existence represents the connection between needlework, identity, and loss. She states that "in physically cutting away a section of a sampler crafted by her own hand during her youth, [the infant's] mother cleaved a part of her own identity to leave with her [infant] at the hospital."[88] This highlights the significance of touch in the formation of eighteenth-century maternal identity and the ways in which this touch is encapsulated by textiles. Fluctuating states of permanence and impermanence are captured within handmade domestic textile objects including layette pincushions. Deeply embedded with emotional turmoil, these objects provide a counter-narrative to celebratory objects, based primarily on the social constructs of class, while still sharing the affective temporalities of textiles as a common ground.

Tina Campt beautifully articulates the duality of affective objects "whose effects are structured by a sense of touch—an indexical touch, a physical touch, and an affective touch . . . They are objects that 'move' us both through our physical contact with them and through the affective investments with which we imbue them."[89] Terms such as "touching," "feeling," and "moving" all have a dualistic meaning in that they refer simultaneously to physiological and psychological sensations. Just as we can physically feel a layette pincushion or printed photograph in our hands, these objects also often elicit an emotional response tied to memory or empathy. I feel that objects and images are both

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[88] Holloway, "Materializing Maternal Emotions," 171.

[89] Tina Campt, *Image Matters: Archive, Photography, and the African Diaspora in Europe* (Duke University Press, 2012) describes the haptic qualities and familial relationships encapsulated within early-twentieth-century multi-racial family photographs. Although this is a different medium of material memory, I feel that her precise articulation of tactility applies to the mnemonic qualities of domestic textiles as well.

conduits to stimulate memory but that they function differently. Paintings, photographs, and other representational images often recall the exact moment in time that they represent whereas textile objects often hold tactile memories as they are so often in close proximity to our bodies.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between needlework education and socially constructed feminine, domestic, and maternal identities is present in the embodied material knowledge that would have gone into the creation of these pincushions and strongly exemplifies the ways in which notions of eighteenth-century womanhood and motherhood were defined and deployed. They provided comfort for mothers attempting to "navigate the transitional nature or pregnancy from uncertainty to something closer to certainty."[90]

Layette pincushions are potent with tenderness but riddled with the painful contingency of a time when pregnancy was experienced as a series of difficult transitions and constant apprehension. They are sites of convergence where the boundaries between materiality and identity begin to blur as eighteenth-century women were inextricably intertwined with needlework practice and textile production.

Damaging social constructions of gender continue to permeate into the present as contemporary notions of womanhood remain in the eyes of many to be bound to childbirth and domesticity. The incessant attempts to solidify gender norms contribute to intolerance and bigotry towards those who exist between these arbitrary historical boundaries. The historically consistent perception of the needle as an instrument of both confinement and autonomy reflects the dualistic nature of the pin as an implement that demonstrates both harm and care. Often passed down in families for generations, pincushions and other needlework objects trace the trajectories of maternal lineages over

[90] Begiato, Breeding a "little stranger," 23.

time while their complex narratives remain deeply embedded within contexts of social history and contemporary craft.[91]

[91] For the ways in which craft histories continue to shape contemporary art see Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft* (Berg Publishers, 2007); Elissa Auther, *String, Felt, Thread: The Hierarchy of Art and Craft in American Art* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Maria Elena Buszek (ed.), *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art* (Duke University Press, 2011); Nicholas R. Bell, ed., *Nation Building: Craft and Contemporary American Culture* (Bloomsbury, 2016); Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Fray: Art and Textile Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 2017); Anthea Black and Nicole Burisch (eds.), *The New Politics of the Handmade: Craft, Art and Design* (Bloomsbury 2020).

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Appendix A

FIGURES

Figure 1. Detail of a layette pincushion in the Winterthur Museum collection showing the metalwork trim. This cushion was made by an unknown maker in 1777. (*Photograph by Author*)

Figure 2. Full image of object mentioned in previous figure. This cushion was made by an unknown maker in 1777. (*Photograph by Author*)

Figure 3. Detail of a layette pincushion at the Woodford Mansion in Philadelphia showing where pins were used as a design element to cover the seams and evidence of construction. This cushion was made by an unknown maker in 1795 and was previously in the collection of Susan Burrows Swan. (*Photograph by Author*)

Figure 4. Full image of object mentioned in previous figure. This cushion was made by an unknown maker in 1795 and was previously in the collection of Susan Burrows Swan (*Photograph by Author*)

Figure 5. Detail of a layette pincushion in the DAR Museum collection showing wool used as stuffing material. This cushion was made by an unknown maker in the late-eighteenth century but the exact date is unknown. (*Photograph by Author*)

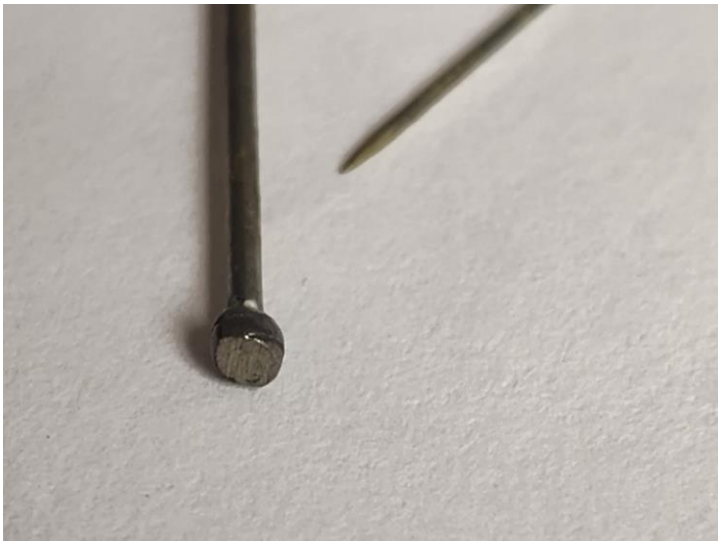

Figure 6. Detail of an eighteenth-century handmade pin showing the scraped surface of the pin head. (*Photograph by Author*)

Figure 7. Detail of a layette pincushion in the V&A collection showing the dimension of eighteenth-century handmade pins. This cushion was made by Mary Lucas in 1787. (*Photograph by Author*)

Figure 8. Detail of a layette pincushion in the V&A collection showing the flat heads of nineteenth-century mechanized pins. This cushion was made by an unknown maker in 1887. (*Photograph by Author*)

Figure 9. Layette pincushion in the V&A collection showing the date of 1838, which is the latest dated cushion with handmade pins I have encountered. (*Photograph by Author*)

Figure 10. Layette pincushion in the V&A collection showing the date of 1862, which is the earliest dated cushion with mechanized pins I have encountered. (*Photograph by Author*)

Figure 11. Layette pincushion in the V&A collection showing expansion of color in the nineteenth-century cushions. This cushion was made by an unknown maker in 1887. (*Photograph by Author*)

Figure 12. Detail of a layette pincushion in a private collection showing pins with space between instead of directly touching. This cushion was made by an unknown maker in 1798. (*Photograph by Author*)

Figure 13. Detail of a layette pincushion in the V&A collection showing the graphite or other material beneath the pins indicating the design was drawn out on the fabric prior to sticking. (*Photograph by Author*)

Figure 14. Detail of a layette pincushion in the Discovery Museum collection showing the layer of netting beneath the pins. The maker and date are unknown, but the handmade pins indicate eighteenth century. (*Photograph by Author*)

Figure 15. Layette pincushion in the Winterthur Museum collection similar to the square style cushion at the Discovery Museum in Newcastle but without any netting. The maker and date are unknown, but the handmade pins indicate eighteenth century. (*Photograph by Author*)

Figure 16. Detail of a layette pincushion in a private collection showing that there are only seams on three out of four sides. This means that the cushion was made of one cut of fabric folded in half rather than two separate cuts. (*Photograph by Author*)

Figure 17. Front side of layette pincushion in the DAR Museum collection. This cushion was made to commemorate the birth of Elizabeth Rea Rhodes in 1786. (*Photograph by Author*)

Figure 18. Back side of layette pincushion in the DAR Museum collection. This cushion was made to commemorate the birth of Elizabeth Rea Rhodes in 1786. (*Photograph by Author*)

Figure 19. Detail of a layette pincushion in the Winterthur Museum collection showing pins holding the exterior fabric layer in place despite being threadbare in all surrounding areas. This cushion was made by an unknown maker in 1777. (*Photograph by Author*)

Figure 20. Layette pincushion in the Winterthur Museum collection showing pins holding the exterior fabric layer in place despite being threadbare in all surrounding areas. This cushion was made by an unknown maker in 1777. (*Photograph by Author*)

Figure 21. Detail of a layette pincushion in the Daughters of the American Revolution Museum collection showing threadbare area where pins are missing. The maker and date are unknown, but the handmade pins indicate eighteenth century. (*Photograph by Author*)