

The Three Graces of Intersectionality:
A Curious Journey across Cultures and Time
By Jennifer Crew Solomon, Ph.D.

The three graces were initially worshiped as three aniconic stones (i.e., representations without human or animal form) that were believed to have fallen from heaven. Over time and across cultures, they came to symbolize femininity. They soon took their more familiar form as three maidens and then goddesses in Greek and Roman culture. Albrecht Durer used a traditional three graces pose, added a fourth female to his engraving, and entitled his work the Four Witches. Pablo Picasso portrayed them as threatening prostitutes. “The Three Graces” have been used in advertisements to sell corsets, cars, electronics, ale, and lard. They are known as graces, fates, sisters, goddesses, charities, norms, gratiae, and triple goddesses such as the Mayan, Xochiquetzal (sho-chee-quet-zal). Mountains, rocks, flowers, trees, buildings, lighthouses, and postcards of horses, dogs, cats, and African women bear the name three graces or three sisters. The words “The Three Graces” were handwritten on old photographs of three white men.

I did a content analysis of physical objects, images, and references to the Three Graces in art, history, poetry, fiction, and advertisements. In this paper, I describe the ways in which the “Three Graces” illustrate the intersectionality of race, class, sex, gender, age, sexuality, ethnicity, and religion across cultures and time.