

## INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

ProQuest Information and Learning  
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA  
800-521-0600

UMI<sup>®</sup>



**"A SPLENDID ARMY OF ORGANIZED WOMANHOOD"  
GENDER, COMMUNICATION AND  
THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF CANADA, 1893-1918**

**By**

**ANNE-MARIE KINAHAN, B.A., M.A.**

**A thesis submitted to  
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**School of Journalism and Communication**

**Carleton University**

**Ottawa, Ontario**

**August 2005**

**© copyright**

**2005, Anne-Marie Kinahan**



Library and  
Archives Canada

Bibliothèque et  
Archives Canada

0-494-08337-9

Published Heritage  
Branch

Direction du  
Patrimoine de l'édition

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file* *Votre référence*

*ISBN:*

*Our file* *Notre référence*

*ISBN:*

**NOTICE:**

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

**AVIS:**

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

---

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

  
**Canada**

## **Abstract**

This dissertation provides a two-fold analysis of the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC), focusing on the first twenty-five years of the organization, a period that runs from 1893 to 1918.

The first aspect of this analysis is a discussion of the National Council as a "discursive public" in Canadian society. Drawing on contemporary feminist and political theory on civil society, I argue that the National Council attempted to provide a role for middle-class women in public life. I argue that the National Council was a place where middle-class women gathered together, created knowledge about relevant social issues and attempted to shape public debate. Arguing that the Canadian nation needed the active, thoughtful and organized participation of middle-class women, Council members discursively constructed women's citizenship as an outgrowth of their moral responsibilities within the home.

The second aspect of this study is an analysis of Council discourses on the issues of woman suffrage, domestic science and women's education, and the problem of "pernicious" literature. Through discussions on these issues, Council members defined the parameters of women's participation in the public sphere. Focusing specifically on Council discourses on woman suffrage, women's education and "pernicious" literature, I argue that Council members discursively constructed the female citizen in Canada as a moral exemplar, a unifying force for the nation, and a force of good in the world. Grounding women's citizenship in notions of personal influence and moral suasion, I conclude that the Council postulated a form of transcendent citizenship for Canadian women.

While such discourses sought to secure political recognition for women's as citizens, they nevertheless constructed their citizenship as different from men's. Women's citizenship was not rooted in universal notions of justice and equality, but rather in the sacred notions of virtue, morality and self-sacrifice. As such, women's citizenship was feminized.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my deepest thanks to my own "splendid army" of advisors, colleagues, family and friends without whose support, expertise, time, dedication and commitment, this project would never have seen the light of day.

First of all, I want to express my heartfelt thanks to my committee, Michael Dorland, Eileen Saunders, and Alan Hunt. Their support and enthusiasm for this project sustained me emotionally and intellectually. As my advisor, Michael Dorland went above and beyond the call, devoting his precious vacation time to reading and re-reading drafts of the dissertation. For your patience, your commitment and your direction, I thank you. Eileen Saunders and Alan Hunt were instrumental in the shape, direction, and completion of this project. Always available to read chapters in progress and to provide constructive and productive feedback, Eileen and Alan helped me through some of the more challenging theoretical aspects of this work.

I would also like to thank Percy Walton for her continued interest and support of my work.

The faculty and administrative staff in the School of Journalism and Communication at Carleton University were, of course, instrumental in the completion of the project. I wish to thank Carole Craswell and Connie Laplante for their efficient handling of the administrative tasks involved in the final stages of completing and defending the project.

I would also like to thank the School of Journalism and Communication for its ongoing financial support, first through graduate funding and most recently through full-time employment.

I was fortunate enough to receive graduate funding from Carleton University, as well as from the Ontario Graduate Scholarship program and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

My immediate and extended family members have, over the years, provided me with much needed friendship, distraction, humour and love. To my parents, Pauline and Michael Kinahan, I owe so much. Thank you for believing in me, for your emotional support in good times and bad, and for attending my conference presentations! To Kathryn Kinahan, sister and dear friend, thank you for your wonderful sense of humour, your love of life, and your excellent suggestion of a Florida vacation! To my brother and sister-in-law, Mike and Karen, thank you for encouraging me to pursue my Ph.D. Your enthusiasm and support when I was hedging about the trials of graduate work helped me take the plunge. My brother John has been a constant source of strength and inspiration in my life and in my

work. For providing me with a place to live upon my return to Ottawa and easing my transition to life as a doctoral student, I owe you much more than I can say.

I wish to acknowledge the friendship and support of the women and men I have met in my many years of grad school. I would particularly like to thank Shirley Anne Off, Bill Jeffery, Melanie White, Dina Salha, Pat Mazepa, and Kirsten Kozolanka.

My deepest gratitude and love goes to Andrew Grant. Words cannot express what it means to have you in my life. Your strength, your support and your seeming endless interest in this project sustained and motivated me throughout some very demanding times. Thank you.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my sister-in-law, Lisa Kinahan. Although she is not here to celebrate its completion, I feel her strength, her spirit, and her companionship still. I am a better person for having known you, and I thank you for the all too brief time that you were in my life.

## Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Table of Contents	vi
<b>Chapter One</b>	
First Wave Feminism and the Formation of the National Council of Women of Canada	1
The Search for Definitions: "First Wave" Feminism in Canada	7
Women's Activism and Social Reform	11
Religious Organizations and Female Activism	16
"New Women" for the Nation: Empire, Imperialism and Nation-Building	21
Organizing the Nation's Women: The Formation of the National Council	23
The National Council and the Creation of a Women's Public Sphere	26
The National Council as a Discursive Public	28
Creating the Female Citizen: Council Discourses	30
The National Council and Gender History	31
The National Council and the Practices of Communication	33
Parameters of the Study	34
Linguistic Tensions: The Fédération Nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste	41
Women's Place in the Nation	42
<b>Chapter Two</b>	
Gender, Influence and Communication: Theorizing Civil Society and the National Council of Women	45
Cultural Modernity and the Promise of Rationality	47
Dualistic Social Theory: System and Lifeworld	48
Protest Potentials and New Social Movements	49
Public and Private Spheres: Feminist Critiques of Critical Theory	50
Gendered Spaces: System and Lifeworld	53
System, Lifeworld and the Promise of Civil Society	57
System, Lifeworld and Feminist Movements	60
Women, Participation and Civil Society	65
Inclusion and Recognition: Women and Civil Society	68
Equality, Difference and Maternal Politics	72
Women, Civil Society and the National Council	75
<b>Chapter Three</b>	
Representing the Nation's Women: The Dual Function of the National Council of Women	77
Feminist Politics and the Public Sphere	78
Private Morality and Public Duties: Mothering as a Collective Identity	83
Women's Clubs and Self-Development	87

Civil Society, Publics and the National Council	90
Defining "Organized Womanhood"	94
The Public Role of Virtuous Womanhood	97
The National Council, Representation and Moderation	99
Representation and Religious Differences: The Debate Over Silent Prayer	101
The National Council and Women's Public Opinion	104
<b>Chapter Four</b>	
Transcendent Citizenship: Suffrage and the Politics of Organized Womanhood	110
The "Problem" of Woman Suffrage	114
The NCWC, Communication and Knowledge	118
Conflict or Consensus? Council's Official Endorsement of Suffrage	121
Suffrage and the Critique of Modern Society	126
Reason, Rationality and Woman Suffrage	131
Suffrage as a Democratic Right	132
Suffrage and Social Reform	136
Suffrage and Protecting the Home	138
Women, Motherhood and Suffrage	139
Suffrage, Motherhood and Purifying Politics	143
Suffrage, Individuality and Women's Collective Rights	145
Woman Suffrage, War, and Peace	149
Provincial Suffrage and Women's Responsibilities	151
Organized Womanhood and the Responsibilities of Citizenship	154
Suffrage and Mothering the Nation	159
<b>Chapter Five</b>	
"A Higher Type of Womanhood": Gender, Domestic Science and the Education of Canadian Women	162
Women, Education and Generalized Forms of Communication	165
The Significance of Women's Education	166
The Movement to Establish Domestic Science Training in Canada	168
Deficient Motherhood and the Education of Girls	173
Women's Place in the Nation: Making the Home a National Mission	179
Education for Women or Education for Mothers? Education and the Rhetoric of Separate Spheres	183
Domestic Science and Social Reform	188
Education, Moral Regulation and Parental Responsibility	192
Education and Women's Activism	194
Women on School Boards	196
From Domestic Science to Education: Women's Participation in the Public Sphere	201

<b>Chapter Six</b>	
<b>Cultivating the Taste of the Nation: The National Council's Campaign Against "Pernicious" Literature</b>	<b>203</b>
Enlightened and Informed Public Opinion: The Institutional Place of the NCWC	206
Creating the Virtuous Mother: "Pernicious" Literature and the Moral Responsibilities of Canadian Women	211
Mother as Martyr: Maternal Sacrifice and the Legacy of the Nation	215
Encouraging Women Along the Righteous Path: Council as Moral Exemplar	216
The Powerful Effects of Popular Media	220
From Suppression to Substitution: Council's Moral Regulation	223
Children at Risk: the Presence of the Other	225
The Masses and the Public: Reading as a Discipline	228
Taste and the Canadian Public	232
<b>Conclusion</b>	
<b>Gender, Communication and the National Council of Women of Canada</b>	<b>236</b>
Personal Influence and Moral Suasion: Women's Transcendent Citizenship	239
Women's Influence and Political Power	244
Bypassing Dichotomies: Thinking Beyond Radical vs. Conservative	248
Invoking Representative Status: Council Women as Moral Exemplars	251
Gender, Nation, and Communication	252
Citizenship, Culture, and Communication	255
<b>References</b>	<b>259</b>

## **Chapter One**

### **First Wave Feminism and the Formation of the National Council of Women of Canada**

---

The attempt to reclaim the voices of feminism's "first wave" has been an on-going concern for feminist scholars and historians since the re-emergence of the women's movement in the late 1960s. Ostensibly concerned to uncover the hidden history of the forebears of modern feminism, historians of women have investigated women's participation in the public sphere through political struggles such as those to win the suffrage, equal access to education, recognition under the law, property rights, and other legal issues.

For Canadian historians, examining first wave feminism represents an opportunity to analyze the varied and contradictory history of women's participation in public life. A survey of literature on first wave feminism in Canada reveals the following characteristics of the movement: (1) feminism was "maternalist" in nature; (2) it was linked to social reform; (3) it emerged as an outgrowth of religious activism and commitment; (4) it coincided with imperialistic and nation-building projects. These characteristics help to situate the emergence of the National Council of Women of Canada at the turn of the twentieth century.

Specifically concerned with the status of the family and women's roles therein, the National Council sought to create a public role for women addressing various social issues facing the nation. These issues included the social problems associated with industrialization and emergent capitalism, the role of churches and religious faith in Canadian society, and the status and progress of

the Canadian nation. In attempting to facilitate women's participation in the public realm, Council members focused on a variety of issues that were deemed significant for the nation's women. These issues included immigration and domestic service, the care of "feeble-minded" women, domestic science and women's education, woman suffrage, and the problem of "pernicious" literature. A central consideration at the heart of these issues was the moral and physical health of current and future generations. So, the "problem" of "pernicious" literature, for example, was rooted in Council members' concerns that the availability of dime novels and crime fiction posed a serious moral threat to Canadian youth.

This dissertation explores how Council members created knowledge about these topics and claimed to represent "women's public opinion" on these issues. Investigating the discourses produced by women active in Council, my analysis examines the process by which the organization attempted to furnish its members with a political subjectivity as gendered public actors. This subjectivity was predicated upon an understanding of and appreciation for women's "natural" roles as mothers and caregivers. By interrogating the operation of gender identity in Council discourses, this dissertation uncovers how such discourses constructed an understanding of the "public-spirited" woman as a force for good in the world. The Council's activism on issues of woman suffrage, women's education and the problem of "pernicious" literature contributed to the discursive construction of the female citizen in Canadian public life.

In a review essay discussing Michael Schudson's *The Good Citizen*, Sklar (2000) ponders the reasons for women's seeming invisibility from "traditional" histories of politics and citizenship. She suggests that women are absent from these accounts because "the frequency with which women have historically framed their political participation in moral, ethical, and religious discourses locates them outside the frame of reference that most scholars (including historians of women) use to analyze political culture" (55-56). Indeed, as feminist historians and historians of women have demonstrated, the search for women in public has necessitated the re-conceptualization of the political. Ryan (1992) has strongly argued that once we search for women in public, the distinctions between public and private, male and female, political and domestic, begin to crumble. Hence, scholars have broadened their analyses to consider women's participation in a range of public activities such as moral reform and regulation (Walkowitz, 1992; Bland, 1995; Strange, 1995), charity and philanthropic work (Ginzberg, 1990), women and the law (Backhouse, 1991) and women's participation in cultural and literary societies (Murolo, 1997; Haarsager, 1997; Blair, 1979; Scott, 1991).

For Canadian scholars, the investigation into women's participation in the public sphere has involved an engagement with overtly political issues such as the struggle for the vote (Cleverdon, 1974; Bacchi, 1983), but also with women's entry into the professions (Strong-Boag, 1979), and access to higher education (McKillop, 1994). In addition, and more recently, Canadian historians have begun to investigate the role played by middle-class, white women in imperialist and

nation-building projects (Devereux, 1999; Henderson, 2003; Valverde, 1991), as well as the history of women's organizations such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and women's missionary societies (Cook, 1995; Brouwer, 1990; 2002). The work undertaken by Canadian historians reveals a keen interest in the relationships between gender identity, ethnicity, class position and nation-building projects. For feminist historians, a central concern has been to cast a critical eye over the involvement of middle-class, white women in projects of moral and social reform, urban renewal, character formation and nation-building. For these scholars, history is more than tales of the exploits of great men in creating great countries or waging great wars. An equally important aspect of these events is the creation of a self-disciplining citizenry – a process carried out through various practices aimed at the reformation of the self. For historians such as Strange (1995), the reform of the leisure activities and pursuits of working-class women in Toronto at the turn of the twentieth century was a central element in the creation of a moral citizenry, but also in the emergence of the "middle-class matron" as moral exemplar. The recognition of the middle-class matron as citizen was predicated upon her apparent moral superiority, and her "difference" from the working-class women she sought to uplift.

These investigations have been part and parcel of an attempt to problematize the practice of "traditional" academic history, which has been criticized for marginalizing the voices of traditionally under-represented groups such as women, the working classes, and ethnic minorities. Feminist historians in Canada have stressed the need to be attentive to the ever-shifting dynamics of

race, ethnicity, class, and gender identity, and how these subjectivities may serve to privilege some social actors over others (Dubinsky et al., 1992; McPherson et al., 1999; Iacovetta and Kealey, 1995/1996). Through their investigations into the moral regulation of working-class women (Little, 1998; Strange, 1995); women's roles in social reform (Kealey, 1979); the history of moral regulation (Valverde, 1991); and women and socialism (Newton, 1995), Canadian historians have expanded the scope of traditional history while problematizing the attempt to construct heroic narratives.

My own analysis of the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) is concerned to engage with and contribute to the existing debates on women's history and gender history in Canada. This project discusses the NCWC as an organization within an emergent Canadian public sphere that purported to represent the "enlightened public opinion" of Canadian women, and that furnished white, middle-class women with a gendered identity as moral and national exemplars. As such, this dissertation interrogates the intersections of gender identity and class privilege with nation-building discourses at the turn of the twentieth century in Canada. This project is informed by multiple perspectives within women's history, gender history, and communication. While not concerned to "reclaim" the NCWC as a feminist organization, I investigate how the Council enabled a public role for the nation's women. At the same time, I am concerned to interrogate how these women were able to use their social status and gender identity to construct a political subjectivity. Additionally, I illustrate how the discursive constructions of Canadian women as "maternal nationalists," in

Wilton's (2000) phrase, served to undercut or foreshorten debate about their expanding social role.

The following discussion surveys some of the existing literature on the "first wave" women's movement in Canada. Concerned to understand the social, political and cultural conditions that fostered the creation of the NCWC, I discuss the various aspects of women's participation in the public sphere. This discussion considers the social and historical factors that shaped and potentially limited women's public participation and also seeks to understand how the National Council positioned itself as a representative voice of and for Canadian women. This chapter seeks to interrogate the role of gender identity, class privilege and nation-building projects in the formation of the NCWC. To that end, I discuss the Council as an organization operating within the public sphere and interrogate its claims to speak on behalf of Canadian women.

First, a brief note about terminology. Throughout this chapter, I use the term "first wave feminism" to describe the various aspects of women's participation in the public sphere at the turn of the twentieth century. While there has been some debate about whether the race-based, imperialistic rhetoric of women like Nellie McClung should be reclaimed as feminist, I use the term critically and with attention to the ways in which white women were specifically privileged through their race and class status.

### **The Search for Definitions: “First Wave” Feminism in Canada**

In her introductory essay to the edited collection *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s*, Linda Kealey (1979) makes a clear connection between the first wave women's movement and social and moral reform campaigns. She locates the emergence of the reform movement in the “middle-class women's revolt against the uselessness of a dependent existence” (2). Concerned with urban and social problems such as over-crowding and disease and the processes of immigration and urbanization, middle and upper middle-class women began to formulate engaged criticisms of social problems. Specifically arguing that women played a role in addressing these issues, middle-class women “became involved in a wide range of social and political activity heretofore reserved for men” (2). This connection between women and reform characterizes the work of several Canadian historians. Indeed, Canadian historians have made an explicit and engaged attempt to account for the multiplicities of women's involvement in the public sphere. What is significant about the link between women and reform is that such a linkage created the concept of the “maternal” feminist. As Kealey notes, “a disparate group of middle-class women created a mission for themselves which called forth their unique capabilities as women and especially as mothers” (2). In attempting to stake out a public role for the nation's women, middle-class social and moral reformers argued that “woman's special role as mother gives her the duty and the right to participate in the public sphere” (7).

In this sense, the identification of “first wave” feminism with “maternalism” suggests that Canadian feminism was “relational,” in Offen’s (1988) categorization. Attempting to provide a transhistorical definition of feminism, Offen argues that two streams of feminist thought can be identified in Anglo-American feminism. One is an individualist stream, which argued for women’s rights as human rights, and the second is a relational stream, which argued for women’s rights as women and with reference to their social roles and responsibilities (136). She contends that the “relational” stream is much more prevalent in feminist and women’s history and that any attempt to reclaim “first wave” feminism must be attentive to this “relational” understanding of the women’s movement.

While this brand of “relational” or “maternal” feminism provided women with entrance into public life, it also served to severely limit their participation in the public sphere. Through their participation in maternal feminism, women constructed and drew upon their “special” moral status to justify expanding their domain. According to Kealey, reformers believed that only women were able to “salvage the wreckage of society” (8). But, at the same time that women saw the public sphere opening before them, the “biological rationale” of maternal feminism “doomed them to a restrictive social role based on home and family” (8). Hence, located within this “maternal” feminism, was an inherent limitation on the reach of feminist arguments. While women could offer informed and engaged analyses of specific social and moral problems, such analyses were predicated upon their unacknowledged place as the moral centre of the home. For

contemporary historians and feminists, maternal feminism has raised the spectre of female complicity with the rise of the social welfare state and that state's increasing intrusion into all aspects of individual's lives (Fraser, 1989). As Offen notes,

the real problem late twentieth-century feminist theorists have had with relational feminist arguments, both historically and today, is that such arguments seem to cut both ways; even as they support a case for women's distinctiveness and complementarity of the sexes, they can be appropriated by political adversaries and twisted once again to endorse male privilege (1988: 154).

For earlier generations of Canadian social and feminist historians, "maternal" feminism emerges as the specific public articulation of middle-class female reform efforts (Roberts, 1979; Bacchi, 1983; Kealey, 1979; Strong-Boag, 1976). This focus on the class position of the first wave of Canadian feminists is an important reminder that public participation and recognition were perhaps more easily extended to individuals from a higher social status. But, as Kealey rightly notes in her discussion, not all female reformers identified as "feminist." Rather, the social and moral reform movement provided an opportunity for the expansion of women's domain and, for some more radical women, an opportunity to argue for women's political, social and economic equality.

In her discussion on feminism and socialism at the turn of the century, Newton (1995) argues that "maternal" feminism was not merely the preserve of middle-class female reformers. She contends that domestic concerns were wide ranging concerns for working-class women and men as well.

Domestic concerns shaped women's lives, even the lives of working-class women and those who worked for pay. The development of a more radical, socialist-feminist voice would

require the ability to transcend middle-class biases, but this would not necessarily entail a rejection of women's concerns about their domestic and maternal roles (20).

Newton's assertion that such concerns also preoccupied working-class and labour activists suggests the centrality of the domestic sphere and gendered relations in social, economic, and political organization.

So, while the domestic sphere was not solely a concern to the middle classes, maternal feminism was one avenue through which middle-class values could be circulated throughout society. For Roberts (1979), Kealey (1979), and Strong-Boag (1976), maternal feminism was a specific form of class power, as the public voice of a conservative and reform-minded middle-class. While maternal feminism challenged the public/private dichotomy by bringing "private" concerns into the public sphere, it also prevented a wide scale interrogation of gender relations within the home and in society at large. As Kealey (1979) notes, a transferral of "female" virtues into the male defined public sphere did not challenge the underlying logic of separate spheres for women and men, it merely suggested that "a shifting of priorities and techniques could remedy flaws in the system" (8). Maternal feminism, then, carved out a space for middle-class, white, Protestant women to participate in the public sphere. This participation was, however, predicated upon gendered distinctions that linked her to the domestic sphere and to the moral care and rearing of future generations.

## **Women's Activism and Social Reform**

The articulation of women's concerns within a context that privileged her status as mother and caretaker had specific consequences for her status as a political actor. For historians like Errington (1988), Roberts (1979), and Mitchinson (1979), women's entry into the social realm was a reflection of the increasing social character of the projects of social and moral reform. They argue that the "feminist" commitment to suffrage was belied by a larger commitment to social issues such as temperance, social purity and other forms of moral regulation. In her discussion of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, for example, Mitchinson (1979) concludes by lamenting the organization's "conservative" approach and reminds the reader that "they were social feminists, not feminists" (167). That is, they were more concerned with social and moral issues such as intemperance than with securing women's social, legal and economic equality. Errington (1988) provides a slightly more generous interpretation of these activists:

for the 'club' women of the East and the cities, suffrage was merely the means to ensure the success of various reforms, particularly prohibition, protection of women in the workplace, and care of the nation's children. The female preoccupation remained the home and family (70).

Within this "conservative" framework, historians locate the failures of first wave feminism: that it did not truly liberate women from their secondary status as wives and mothers. But for Roberts, this conservatism has an additional genesis. He contends that the conservative strain in turn-of-the-century feminism was a reflection of the class bias of upper- and middle-class, white reformers. Detailing

the process by which the radical potential of the "new woman" was directed toward social reform projects, Roberts (1979) claims

the moralistic and maternal tangent of the new woman's reform thinking became aligned with conservative notions of social order in conjunction with another social process: the conversion of the lives of upper-class matrons from ones of ostentatious idleness to ones as overseers of a social spring cleaning (19).

The rise of national women's organizations in the latter decades of the nineteenth century signaled the beginning of women's mobilization for increased participation in spheres beyond the home. Canadian historians have noted that the years from the 1870s to the 1890s were instrumental in the development of women's national organizations. For Strong-Boag (1977), Brandt (1985), Mitchinson (1987), and Morrison (1976) women's national organizations were an outgrowth of women's missionary work, as well as their participation in reform-minded group such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). Gail Cuthbert Brandt (1985) notes that women's missionary societies in the Baptist and Methodist Churches were created in the 1870s expressly to support the work of female missionaries (81). Specifically concerned with "spreading the gospel throughout the world" female missionary societies "played an extremely important role in helping to initiate women into a wider sphere of action, beyond their homes and even their churches" (81). In addition to initiating women into a wider sphere, such societies also introduced women to strategies of co-operation, organization, and social activism (Brandt, 1985: 81; Mitchinson, 1987; Errington, 1988).

But in addition to women's work in foreign missionaries, the 1870s and 1880s also witnessed a rising concern with social problems characterizing Canadian society. The processes of modernization, immigration, and industrialization had brought with them increasing poverty, over-crowding, violence, gambling, and alcohol consumption. Organizations such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Young Women's Christian Association were formed specifically to address these social problems and to work toward their eradication.

Specifically organized to prohibit the sale and consumption of alcohol in Canada, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union was formed in Picton, Ontario in 1874. Convinced that alcohol was responsible for the majority of the social problems facing Canadian society, temperance crusaders established several local chapters in Ontario, formed an Ontario provincial chapter in 1877, and a national union in 1883 (Brandt, 1984: 83). While primarily committed to total prohibition of alcohol, temperance advocates also crusaded on a number of social and moral issues such as domestic science instruction, missionary work, social purity, and woman suffrage (Strong-Boag, 1977: 90).

The Young Women's Christian Association was formed in St. John, New Brunswick in 1870 with the specific mandate of providing housing for single women working in Canada's urban centres. As Mitchinson (1987) notes, "it was felt that young working women would benefit from being surrounded by Christian souls, ensuring they were made spiritually strong and hence morally strong" (79). While not strictly a "religious" organization, the middle-class women who

comprised the membership of the YWCA were strongly committed to Protestant evangelicalism. Strong-Boag (1977) asserts that such a commitment introduced a "paternalistic" relationship between the YWCA's matrons and the young women they aimed to uplift. "One symptom of this was the training of girls for domestic service, sometimes in the homes of their benefactors" (91). Well-established in various Canadian cities in the 1880s, the YWCA formed a national chapter in 1893 (Strong-Boag, 1977: 91).

Through their participation in religious, moral and social reform organizations, female reformers were becoming increasingly vocal and active on a variety of issues affecting young men and women in Canadian society. Additionally, through such activism, these women were developing the moral authority by which they could provide leadership on the best means of addressing these problems.

Scholars have outlined some of the reasons for the rise in women's national organizations. Membership in women's organizations benefited from the rapid urbanization of Canadian cities, advances in transportation facilitated women's ability to travel, many women were delaying marriage and motherhood, and the availability of leisure time for middle-class women allowed them the opportunity to participate in activities outside the home (Hall, 1987: 120-21). Canadian historians have rightly noted that such participation was particularly striking among upper- and middle-class women. As Strong-Boag (1976) notes in her history of the formation of the NCWC, women's ability to participate in the emergent "club movement" was predicated upon their class position. As

members of the middle-class, these women had the leisure time to involve themselves in projects of moral and social reform. Additionally, as middle-class women, they were able to free themselves from the confines of the domestic sphere through the acquisition of domestic servants (Strong-Boag, 1976: 212).

This acknowledgement of women's class status is reflected in the words of Helen MacMurchy, Council member, author, and social reformer, who described the Canadian club woman as

married, not single. She is middle-aged. She is a woman of household occupations and yet with some leisure ... The need of this middle-aged married woman for work and social co-operation, her impulse to help others and to accomplish something worth doing in the world outside, are forces which have created women's organizations (qtd. in Cook, 1974, p. xii).

Hence, women's activism was an act of selfless participation, not an exercise motivated by selfish interests and needs. Indeed, perhaps one of the aspects of women's public participation that made it palatable to the ruling classes was its commitment to social causes and improvement.

Through their activism on social and moral reform issues, women were introduced to strategies of organizing, co-operation and collaboration that paved the way for their further entry into public life. Indeed, as Errington, Mitchinson (1979), and Griffiths (1993) each note, membership in various women's clubs fostered a sense of collective identity, an identity that eventually found expression with the formation of the National Council (Strong-Boag, 1977). Errington (1988) argues that the WCTU "was one of the few, perhaps the only organization that managed to bring diverse and potentially conflicting groups of women into common action" (71). This common action was enabled by the

admittedly conservative focus on the social issues of temperance and prohibition. Indeed, Errington makes special note of the fact that political issues, such as woman suffrage, were cast within an overall commitment to social reform. She states, "the demand for the vote, although a key concern, was merely the means to attain social and political reform" (71).

For social historians, this commitment to social reform explains why the first Canadian women's movement was not more radical in its demands or in its impact. Indeed, with respect to international perspectives on the women's movement, historians such as Offen (1988), Allen (1990), and Bacchi (1983; 1982), have argued that contemporary investigations of first wave feminism in Europe and North America have resulted in a "repudiation" of these women for their focus on sexual and moral regulation, their commitment to the domestic sphere, and their inability to challenge oppressive structures of masculine dominance. These critiques collectively suggest the extent to which a commitment to social and moral reform shaped and constrained women's actions and women's speech in important ways. Indeed, it was only through articulating their concern for future generations, for the status of the family, and the progress of the Canadian nation that female activists were able to stress the necessity of women's enfranchisement and their increased role in social and political affairs.

### **Religious Organizations and Female Activism**

In their book on the role of Protestant churches in the creation of the social welfare state in Canada, Christie and Gauvreau (1996) make an explicit

connection between women's organizations and the social and moral reform campaigns that preoccupied the Protestant church. Suggesting that this relationship was mutually beneficial, they argue that women's organizations

provided the grass-roots organization that supplied the democratic ground swell of public opinion crucial for lobbying government officials, while the Church, with its tremendous cultural authority and national prestige, provided women, labour leaders, and agrarian reformers with a public platform whose Christian character placed it above partisanship and therefore insulated the groups from criticism (108).

The Protestant church built relationships with women's organizations such as the rural-based Women's Institutes and the National Council of Women as part and parcel of a larger social and moral project of Christianizing the nation.

While a full-fledged discussion of the role of religion in the early women's movement in Canada is beyond the scope of this project, it is, nevertheless, an important aspect of women's participation in the public sphere. Through widening her "sphere" to incorporate concern for others, to address social issues such as working conditions, over-crowding, and poverty, female reformers were emboldened by the belief that they were doing "God's work." As Strong-Boag (1977) notes, the first associations of women were largely organized through churches. She further contends that religious affiliations granted female reformers a moral authority that consecrated their actions as necessary for the public good.

The church, the strongest institution in young communities, offered middle-class women in particular one of their few opportunities to escape the household's confines. There, sustained by spiritual authority, they could regularly socialize in the performance of unimpeachable tasks (1977: 89).

This ability of female reformers to claim a spiritual and moral authority was a central element in the process of rendering their activism palatable and acceptable to a public predisposed to herald the rise of this public-spirited woman as a threat to traditional religious and social values. Indeed, for women active in public life in Canada at the turn of the century, issues such as temperance, housing, equal pay for equal work, woman suffrage, education and the problem of “pernicious” literature were all part of a larger moral project aimed at the creation of a virtuous citizenry. While an organization such as the National Council of Women of Canada was significant for the attempt to attract women of diverse religious faiths, it still invoked the image of a religious mission in its pledge to “apply the Golden Rule to society, custom and law” (NCWC, 1914: Preface). As will be discussed later in the dissertation, an early obstacle for the Council was its simultaneous commitment to religious tolerance and “God’s work.” Represented through the early debate over the use of silent prayer, the Council had to carefully present itself as part and parcel of a moral mission, while not formally adhering to a specific religious faith.

Christie and Gauvreau (2003) have argued that religion should be understood as an “ideology” and as a “protean force that functioned in different contexts either as the bulwark of traditionalist social values or, at particularly important junctures, as the agent by which new forms of knowledge were organized” (3). Thus, in the interconnections between churches and women’s groups, there was more than a mutually beneficial relationship, there was also the creation of new social subjectivities, and new opportunities for public

participation. Through invoking and sustaining women's moral authority, female reformers were able to claim a public and moral credibility to speak about issues affecting women and children.

Sklar (2000) notes that it was through these interconnections that women were able to participate in public culture through importing "their own set of higher values" (63). She states, "religious traditions, like Enlightenment traditions of human rights, provided values that transcended traditional political culture and supplied a basis for building a new political culture" (56). Discussing the political culture of the United States in the antebellum period, she argues that the separation between church and state resulted in the transferral to civil society of "much of the religious, moral, and ethical authority that states historically had reserved for themselves" (63). Through this process of secularization, concepts such as rights and citizenship became imbued with moral and ethical force. She further contends that women are central to this process (63-64).

Discussing American culture in the same time period, Douglas (1977) argues that the development of a consumer-based capitalist economy changed the status and function of the family and the church in antebellum America. The crumbling authority of the church coupled with women's consignment to the largely emotional work within the home resulted in what Douglas terms the "feminization" of American culture. Responding to their loss of status and function within society, "liberal ministers and literary women ... were anxious to replace it with emotional indispensability; they turned of necessity from the exercise of power to the exertion of 'influence'" (77). The result, she suggests, is the

proliferation of a sentimentalized culture characterized by sermonizing literature and the emergence of the middle-class literary woman as moral exemplar. While Douglas acknowledges that this process opened up avenues for women's participation and bestowed upon them a degree of moral authority, she also contends that this was a pyrrhic victory. Rooted in the cult of motherhood, women's moral authority was exercised through influence as opposed to direct political power. Indeed, the sentimentalization of motherhood "was an essential precondition to the flattery American women were trained to demand in place of justice and equality" (75).

Christie and Gauvreau (1996) contend that the collaboration between women's organizations and the Protestant churches in Canada at the turn of the century was largely responsible for "laying the groundwork of the modern welfare state" (114). Until the 1930s, they maintain, the welfare state revolved around "issues that concerned women, such as mothers' allowances, minimum wage legislation, child labour legislation, and child welfare policies, and [issues] that served to protect the integrity of the family, such as public health and temperance" (114).

While Strong-Boag (1977) contends that it was difficult for women to "trespass beyond [the] borders" of church membership (89), Christie and Gauvreau (1996) argue that through alliances built with Protestant churches, women became an important and influential lobby group in Canadian society.

While women did not occupy a large place in national political parties, by the early twentieth century women had nevertheless become a powerful force by virtue of their ability to develop sophisticated techniques of influence outside of mainstream male politics (117).

It was the female reformers' connection to moral and social reform that served to render their public activism morally acceptable, as well as patriotic. The service to the nation of female reformers was, for Strong-Boag, the central element in female activism that helped it to break through the strictures imposed by the church. Indeed, she argues that, because religious differences were so stultifying, "only some over-riding sentiment, like nationalism, could counteract the weight of religious differences" (1977: 89). Indeed, as Brandt (1985) contends, nationalism was a central, and often unacknowledged, force in the creation of women's associations on a national level. She contends that the 1880s witnessed religious, political, cultural and regional tensions such as the Riel Rebellion, the Jesuit Estates Question, and the Manitoba Schools Act. Perhaps due to these various tensions "there was a desire on the part of many Canadians, including women, to overcome these divisions and to forge a truly national consciousness" (84).

### **"New Women" for the Nation: Empire, Imperialism and Nation-Building**

As various historians have noted, the rise of the "new woman" promised great things for Canadian women and Canadian society. Roberts argues that this "new woman" had radical and revolutionary potential because she challenged the popular wisdom of women's exclusion from political and public life. But, perhaps because she offered a challenge to the status quo, the new woman was a potentially transgressive and dangerous social subject.

There were a number of citizens, mostly men but also a few women, who feared this new woman, who was organized, forceful, and increasingly vocal in pressing her concerns. By her very

presence in the public arena and her unseemly demands for recognition as the nation's conscience, the new woman, some argued, was challenging, indeed threatening the family and those traditional values she was claiming to strengthen (Errington, 1988: 67).

In her discussion of the confluence of first wave feminism and imperialism in Canada, Devereux (1999) argues that both feminism and imperialism were shaped by the "growing concern about the possible collapse of 'the race' and the British Empire" (177). Because this "new woman" was delaying marriage and motherhood in favour of education, career and public involvement, she embodied the fears associated with emergent feminism. In light of these racial and imperial fears,

suffrage feminism had little choice but to oppose anti-New Woman rhetoric with another 'new' woman-centered discourse of liberation, one that demonstrated a faith in the Empire at least as stalwart as the official view, and that endorsed a similar concept of womanhood (177).

The overwhelming concern with establishing the New World inflected first wave feminism with imperialist, colonialist and nation-building sentiments. As Kealey (1979), Vickers (2000), Devereux (1999), Henderson (2003), and Valverde (1992) note, this commitment to imperialism and nation-building fit well with a maternal feminist commitment to "social uplifting." As Vickers (2000) notes, "in the first wave of feminist mobilisation, from 1880 to 1920, there was a mostly positive fit between the movement's dominant strand and British-Canadian 'colonial nationalism'" (134). She acknowledges that an "equal-rights" strand of feminism existed, but that the majority of the movement focused on the moral promise of maternal feminism. Motherhood had provided women with "values

that would contribute positively to cleaning up politics and to nation-building” (135). Indeed, as Devereux (1999) contends, maternal feminism was the process by which the new woman was incorporated into nation-building projects and “race-regeneration.”

The ‘new’ woman was the figure that came to be known as ‘the mother of the race’ ... She demanded education, the vote, and a hand in running a nation and empire, not for the New Woman’s putatively self-serving ends, but for the good of ‘the race’ (178).

The link between first wave feminism and nation-building projects is solidified through the extension of the franchise to Canadian women before it was extended to women in Britain. Devereux (1999) contends that such actions did not demonstrate more enlightened perceptions of women, but rather reinforced that “white woman’s role in the colonies was seen to be so crucial ... women made a bid for the vote in the settler colonies by arguing that they were needed to swell the ranks of the white electorate” (180). Thus, the new woman, the maternal feminist, the female citizen was discursively constructed in a variety of forms. As a representative of white, middle-class womanhood, she presented an idealized image for all Canadian women; as a white, middle-class mother, she represented the new hope for the regeneration of the Anglo-Saxon race in the New World.

### **Organizing the Nation’s Women: The Formation of the National Council**

Through the confluence of these forces, national women’s organizations attempted to provide women with valuable public and political roles. Prominent among these organizations was the National Council of Women of Canada,

formed in 1893. Errington (1988) argues that women's activism in organizations such as the WCTU, and their participation in a variety of moral and social reform initiatives led to the "growing self-awareness and self-confidence of women" (68). Such confidence, combined with the "realization of the need to expand their scope, prompted the creation of one national body to bring the various national associations into cooperation and common action" (68). Strong-Boag (1977) further contends that the realization that such mobilization would benefit the nation as a whole further necessitated women's collective action. Indeed, "patriotism could be best served by furthering the co-operation of the nation's women" (96).

By 1893, there were a number of women's organizations that were national in scope. In addition to the WCTU, the women's missionary societies and the YWCA, the Dominion Order of King's Daughters (1886), the Imperial Order, Daughters of the Empire (1900), the Girls' Friendly Society (1882), and the Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Association (1889) also sought to represent women's interests and encourage their participation in the public sphere. But, in contrast to these organizations that were expressly organized according to religious or political belief, the National Council of Women of Canada sought to unite all women who were active in areas of moral and social reform. As Boutilier (1994) notes, the National Council "shared the overtly religious purpose of these aggressively evangelical Protestant organizations, but, seeking to unite organized middle-class women of all faiths and creeds in one institution, it adopted a non-sectarian constitution and ecumenical form of public

worship" (1). Indeed, it was the Council's attempt to unite all women regardless of religious belief or political affiliation that set it apart from such women's organizations as the WCTU and the YWCA.

The formation of the National Council of Women of Canada was part of a larger movement that saw the formation of an International Council as well as National Councils in countries such as the United States, England, France, Germany, Sweden and Finland (Griffiths, 1993: 7). American political activists Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and May Wright Sewell were instrumental in the formation of the International Council of Women (ICW), which had its inaugural convention in Washington D.C. in 1888. Discussing the significance of women's emergence onto the public scene, Griffiths (1993) argues that

the vision was above all a vision of consensus, a belief that the provision of a neutral arena, in which women of good will could meet to find common solutions to commonly acknowledged problems, would result in a new and positive influence on world affairs (7).

What was significant about the ICW, and by extension, the NCWC, was that its interests were not tied to one particular issue, reform or cause. As Griffiths notes, "philanthropic work, temperance movements, legal and political struggles, prison reform, hospital work, missionary work, industrial work, all these topics and more were debated in 1888 in Washington" (9). The vision of Council, then, was to allow women a place to come together to discuss these myriad interests, to generate consensus on various issues of concern, and to devise appropriate methods of resolving these problems.

## **The National Council and the Creation of a Women's Public Sphere**

At the World Exposition in Chicago in 1893, the idea of a Canadian Council of Women began to take shape. Canadian women were represented at the ICW meeting in Chicago and Griffiths notes that two women, Mary Macdonell and Emily Willoughby Cummings, were elected to the ICW with the mandate to "promote the formation of a Canadian National Council. Within the year the National Council of Women of Canada had been founded" (Griffiths, 1993: 10). Lady Ishbel Aberdeen, a prominent social reformer and the wife of the newly appointed Governor-General, was elected as the Council's president, a position she held until 1898, when she and her husband returned to Scotland.

Specifically concerned to unite women active in moral and social reform, the Council was premised on a prevailing belief in the power of organized womanhood:

We, women of Canada, sincerely believing that the best good of our homes and nation will be advanced by our own greater unity of thought, sympathy and purpose, and that an organized movement of women will best conserve the highest good of the family and the state, do hereby band ourselves together to further the application of the Golden Rule to society, custom and law (NCWC, 1914: preface).

Significant for its refusal to espouse a specific religious belief or political affiliation, the Council presented itself as a medium for the constitution of women across social, religious, and political divides. In an attempt to appear non-partisan, the Council elected the wives of the Lieutenants-Governor of the Provinces as executive members. While this strategy was defended by Council members (and by Griffiths) as the attempt to circumvent political bias, it also

illustrates the extent to which the Council's executive was composed of socially prominent women, with powerful and influential husbands. This attempt to attract elite or socially prominent women also created a distinction between the Council and women's organizations such as the WCTU. As Cook (1995) notes, the class status and position of the National Council's executive was largely responsible for investing the organization with a degree of social authority not enjoyed by WCTU members (68). This attempt to attract socially prominent and influential women was a stated concern of Aberdeen. She notes in her journal that "the peculiar struggle has been to get the really nice and influential women to take it up" (Saywell, 1960: 89).

Indeed, a central concern for Aberdeen, and for the Council in general, was to secure legitimacy and authority for the organization. Emerging at a time when women's reform efforts were finding expression in national organizations such as the YWCA and the WCTU, the National Council sought to position itself as a non-political and non-denominational organization. Aberdeen goes on to note that this effort presented an initial challenge for the place of the organization within Canadian society:

the idea that organisations of women are only meant to promote either directly religious or missionary work, or women's suffrage work, & so the idea of an organisation simply to bind together all workers, to get them to know & appreciate one another & to unite for common purposes was difficult to inoculate (Saywell, 1960: 89).

Illustrating the extent to which women's "public" activism was seen as an extension of their political or religious beliefs, Aberdeen's comments suggest the difficulties in popularizing a notion of women as engaged citizens with interests

that extend beyond the “personal”. Concerned to attract women from Protestant, Catholic and Jewish faiths, the National Council claimed no specific religious affiliation, which was a sharp contrast to the religious partisanship of the YWCA and WCTU. Boutilier (1994a) further suggests that the significance of the Council’s non-denominational and non-sectarian stance was that it united members through “the bonds of womanhood,” rather than through an adherence to a common religious faith (54). Aberdeen notes in her journal that that central impetus behind the creation of the Council was to specifically unite a diversity of women reformers. Referring to the formation of the Council she notes that “no one can take exception” to the work of the organization “as it is intended to combine all sections of thought & work, secular, philanthropic & religious” (Saywell, 1960: 24). It is in this sense of bringing together the secular, the philanthropic and the religious that the Council can be analyzed as an organization concerned with the various aspects of women’s citizenship. The National Council positioned itself as an institution that mediated between the home and the state, between secular and religious, and between public and private issues. Through its commitment to various moral and social reform issues, the Council attempted to constitute its members as political actors in an emergent Canadian civil society.

### **The National Council as a Discursive Public**

This dissertation presents a two-fold analysis of the National Council of Women of Canada. First of all, I discuss the NCWC as an example of a discursive public

in Canadian society. In his discussion of the creation of the bourgeois public sphere in Europe in the eighteenth-century, Habermas (1974) defines it as “a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed” (49). Building on this concept for contemporary social and feminist theory, Fraser (1992) argues that the public sphere can be conceptualized as “a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk” (110). Applying this understanding of politics and discourse, I argue that the National Council is best understood as a discursive public in which a particular race and class of women engaged in debate about social issues, attempted to arrive at a consensual understanding of these issues, and sought to direct their understanding toward a larger public. Specifically concerned with the Council’s attempts to create and disseminate “women’s public opinion” on a variety of issues, this project seeks to determine how the NCWC strove to represent the public opinion of the nation’s women. How did its commitment to moderation and to non-denominational work influence and affect its ability to represent the interests of Canadian women? How did its national mission of “mothering” influence and shape its approach to controversial issues such as woman suffrage? How did the NCWC create a vision of “public-spirited women” in Canada and what were their responsibilities?

In this dissertation, I argue that through discourses on woman suffrage, women’s education and “pernicious” literature, Council members participated in the construction of the female citizen as a wife, a mother, a patriot, and a unifying force for the nation. Concerned to create a place in public life for Canadian

women, Council members attempted to ensure that women's opinions received a sympathetic hearing from powerful men. How did this interest in securing a conciliatory relationship with political powers shape its approach to issues that potentially challenged women's role in the domestic sphere? This dissertation argues that, through Council discourses on the above issues, women's political identities were constructed as supportive of and ancillary to men's.

### **Creating the Female Citizen: Council Discourses**

The second aspect of this research is an in-depth analysis of Council discourses on the issues of suffrage, women's education and "pernicious" literature. I am specifically interested in investigating how these discourses created an understanding of women's responsibilities to their families and to the nation. This dissertation explores and investigates Council discourses on these issues with the intent of determining the organization's vision of women's public responsibilities. To what extent did the NCWC work toward the recognition of women as equal citizens in Canadian society? Did the organization have a unified and coherent view of women's potential contribution to the nation? How did the organization define and seek to embody women's "duties and responsibilities"? A central consideration of the following discussions is the role played by gender identity in these discourses. To what extent did women's gender identity – and the common perception that the home remained their primary domain – limit or constrain their public participation? Conversely, this

dissertation also interrogates the possibility that the articulation of gender identity enabled or expanded the public domain to facilitate women's participation.

### **The National Council and Gender History**

The ways in which women's privatized identities were invested with public and national significance is a central theme explored in this dissertation. As such, this project makes a contribution to the emergent field of gender history through the attempt to illustrate how gender identity is socially, historically and politically constructed. Through its discourses on woman suffrage, women's education and "pernicious" literature, as well as a variety of other social issues, the NCWC discursively created the category of "women" as gendered political actors. This discursive construction of "organized womanhood" was shaped, and potentially limited, by the available discourses on women's roles in society. Drawing on the insights of poststructuralist feminist theories of gender postulated by Scott (1988a), Riley (1988), Parr (1995) and other "gender historians," the dissertation illustrates how gender is constructed in and through discourse. In demonstrating the relationships between gender, communication and discourse, I follow Cohen's (1995) insight that gender is a "generalized form of communication." This acknowledgment allows for an understanding of how power is routinely produced and reproduced through the social and historical categories of male and female. "Existing gender codes ... are so constructed as to stop questioning at a supposedly unchallengeable meaning complex that is defined as 'natural'" (Cohen, 1995: 70). In the case of the National Council, discourses that stressed

women's "natural" roles as wives and mothers facilitated the creation of a political subjectivity predicated on this identity. Gender, at this particular historical juncture, was a productive force of women's public discourse and communication. Through discussions of "women's responsibilities" to home and the nation, middle-class female reformers were able to communicate with each other and with a larger public. But, at the same time that gender produced a particular form of communication, it also defined the limits of women's participation and their responsibilities. The discourses on women's responsibilities necessarily stopped short of challenging the understanding of women as natural mothers and caregivers.

An in-depth analysis of the discourses on suffrage, education and "pernicious" literature provides an opportunity to investigate how women sought to enlarge the public sphere to facilitate their participation in it. Council members attempted to create an acceptable vision of public-spirited women and did so through a strategic focus on their privatized identities as wives and mothers. This was, however, a double-edged sword: as it provided opportunities for women who were privileged through class status, race and ethnicity, it also circulated stultifying definitions of ideal womanhood for all women. This dissertation argues that the communicative practices of Council members were deeply conflicted and contradictory. A popular refrain of social historians such as Bacchi (1983), Roberts (1979), Kealey (1979), and Mitchinson (1979) has been to lament the conservative and moderate focus of Canada's first wave feminists. Focusing on the "radical potential" of the "new" woman, these social historians detail the

processes by which such radicalism was co-opted by the conservative forces present in organizations like the National Council and the WCTU. While these critiques are useful for their focus on the influence of class position in early feminism, I wish to avoid the trap of labeling such reformers as “conservative.” The emergence of the practice of gender history and its focus on the ways in which gender is invested with historical significance provides a way to think critically about the interrelationships between gender, communication, history and nation-building.

I argue that the NCWC’s communicative actions were shaped, enabled and limited by gender identity, class status, ethnicity and the projects of nation-building. Through the tensions of these sometimes complementary, sometimes conflicting discourses, Canadian women active in the NCWC attempted to create a new political subjectivity for Canadian women. This subjectivity promoted an understanding and acceptance of public-spirited women as moral exemplars, as a unifying force, and as key to the progress of the Canadian nation.

### **The National Council and the Practices of Communication**

The practice of communication is central to the work of the National Council. On the one hand, a belief in the power of face-to-face communication underscored the organization itself. Through regular Annual Meetings, participation in committees, and creation of knowledge about topics such as woman suffrage, Council members claimed to be presenting women’s public opinion about these issues. But additionally, participation in the Council contributed to the creation of

a collective identity among its members. Developing the ability to offer informed and critical perspectives of relevant social issues, Council members engaged in a process of representing the public opinion of the nation's "organized women." In addition to these "internal" functions of communication within the Council, the organization also sought to influence public policy on issues such as women's legal status, representation on school boards, suffrage, and the problem of "pernicious" literature. In the attempt to facilitate communication between Council members and political leaders, Council chose a path of conciliation, moderation and rational argument. As Strong-Boag (1976) notes, women's participation in Council was evidence of their desire to participate in the construction and maintenance of Canadian society, not in its radical alteration. In relying on women's gendered identities as moral exemplars, Council members encouraged the development of women's influence and moral suasion over husbands, sons and political leaders.

### **Parameters of the Study**

This analysis of the National Council of Women focuses on the organization's first 25 years, from its formation to the close of WWI and the extension of the federal franchise to Canadian women, a period that runs from 1893-1918. This timeframe allows for an analysis of how Council members envisioned their role in society and how that mission was articulated and pursued. This historical framework also enables an analysis of the Council's stance on "political" issues such as suffrage and how it responded to the granting of the franchise to

Canadian women. The other two issues that are discussed in detail are the question of women's education and the problem of "pernicious" literature.

Council discourses on women's education were concerned with three aspects of the issue: the provision of domestic science courses in elementary schools, women's access to higher education, and women's representation on school boards. In each of these issues, Council discourses sought to provide a specifically gendered role for women as students, as teachers, and as board members. Council discourses on "pernicious" literature constructed a social subjectivity for Canadian women as public moral guardians. Concerned about the availability of "penny dreadfuls" and crime stories to Canadian children, Council members attempted to prevent the circulation of such "pernicious" material. At the same time, however, they inaugurated a positive reform campaign of encouraging an appreciation for a "higher class" of literature. In each of these examples, Council members created a gendered understanding of women's contributions to Canadian society. In their approaches to suffrage, education, and "pernicious" literature, Council discourses created "democratic receptors" in the system for women's participation. In "feminizing" these domains, Council members sought to make women's political actions an extension of their gendered identities.

I have relied on the Council's Yearbooks as the primary source of information about the organization and its activities. While the Yearbooks represent the most significant amount of information about Council meetings and the issues discussed, they are edited for length and content, and some speeches

are summarized by the editor. While it is still possible to provide an analysis of such discussions, it is also possible that certain issues, themes, and arguments have been edited out of the "official record." Additionally, as an official record of Council's contributions to Canadian society, it is perhaps understandable that disputes, disagreements or conflicts would not be included within the Yearbooks. But despite this reservation, the Yearbooks are a remarkably fertile source for analysis and discussion. Particularly in the first few years, the Yearbooks provide extensive details of each meeting, speech and debate, and do provide an entry point for discussion of possible disagreements or disputes amongst members.

The outbreak of war in 1914 resulted in a very slim volume of the Yearbook, since the Council Executive cancelled the Annual Meeting and instead published the reports of Local Councils and Federated Societies. Again, due to the war, the Council's executive cancelled the Annual Meeting in 1916 and the Council did not meet for a period of eighteen months. But despite these issues, the Yearbooks provide an interesting glimpse into the issues and concerns that motivated the membership of the National Council, and attest to the processes by which the Council debated specific issues and attempted to create women's public opinion on various matters. The Yearbooks are additionally interesting to the extent that they attempt to publicize the work of Council members, to inform the "mass" of Canadian women of their work, and to encourage increased public participation in the work of "social uplifting." As such, the Yearbooks have a public function to the extent that they testify to the "public use of reason" by Council members (Habermas, 1989). Council members themselves became

rationally informed on these issues, they sought to edify, uplift and educate the public, and furthermore, they sought to hold political power accountable to this public body of "organized women." As Habermas notes, "the public of 'human beings' engaged in rational-critical debate was constituted into one of 'citizens' wherever there was communication concerning the affairs of the commonwealth" (106-107). Thus, the Yearbooks are important for the extent to which they generate and circulate women's public opinion on a variety of issues of concern.

This analysis also relies on secondary sources about the organization. Two "official" histories of the Council exist: Rosa Shaw's *Proud Heritage* (1957) and N.E.S. Griffiths's *The Splendid Vision* (1993). Commissioned by the National Council to commemorate significant anniversaries of the organization, these histories are interesting for their attempts to write the Council into the history of the Canadian nation. Of the two books, Griffiths's centennial history of the organization offers a more thorough examination of the organization's place in Canadian society, its attempts to attract women from various ethnic, cultural and religious groups, and to provide women with efficient and effective representation in public life. As commissioned histories of the organization, these two books are, perhaps understandably, generous in their assessment of the National Council. But what is additionally significant is the extent to which these histories are seen by Council members as an effective way to publicize their work and inform the "mass" of Canadian women about the organization and ways to become involved in it.

Another useful history is found in Veronica Strong-Boag's (1976) doctoral dissertation *The Parliament of Women*, published by the Museum of Man. Situated within a feminist and social history perspective, *The Parliament of Women* offers a critically-engaged assessment of the early decades of the organization. Focusing specifically on the class imperatives at work in the Council's mission, Strong-Boag provides a sustained and critical interrogation of the organization. While she offers a cogent critique of the operation of middle-class ideology in the Council, her analysis tends to suggest that the radical potential of first wave feminism was co-opted by the conservative ideology of the organization. While my analysis is sensitive to the operation of class privilege, I want to suggest that the process is more complex than co-optation. Rather, I interrogate the operation of gender, class position, and nation-building in the Council's discursive creation of "women's public opinion."

A more recent contribution to the literature on the National Council is Beverly Boutilier's (1994a; 1994b) analyses of the role of the Council in the formation of the Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada. Through her analysis of the Council's strategies to establish the VON, Boutilier contends that the Council generally, and Lady Aberdeen specifically, attempted to "reconcile two competing perceptions of 'women's work,' one trained, remunerative, and professional, and the other domestic, voluntary, and evangelical" (1994b: 17). Boutilier argues that through the 1890s, Council members linked nursing and the care for the sick to women's supposedly "natural" care-giving capacities, thus establishing an understanding of women as "professional" nurses that did not challenge their

commitment to self-sacrifice and devotion to others (1994b: 42). Boutilier's discussions provide an important contemporary perspective on the Council and its attempts to reconcile the changing social conditions in Canadian society and women's roles therein. My interest in the Council extends beyond its attempts to create one particular organization, however. Instead, this dissertation seeks to determine the processes by which Council members, through the creation of knowledge about a range of issues, sought to legitimize women's participation in Canadian public life.

This dissertation focuses on the National Council and its attempts to unite Canadian women in the work of moral, social, and educational reform. It is the National organization that provides the primary object of this analysis. The dissertation discusses the participation of various Local Councils of Women and federated societies, but does so within the context of their participation in the National Council's Annual Meetings. I take as my starting point the role of the National Council in responding to and shaping women's activities on a variety of social issues. While the Council's reform initiatives and strategies were carried out at the Local level, I analyze the National Council as a symbolic example of the "bringing together" of the nation's women. A detailed discussion on various Local Councils is beyond the scope of this analysis not because they are not worthy of study, but due to my decision to focus on the national expression of women's public opinion. Particularly concerned with the processes by which these "organized women" were able to claim a degree of public legitimacy and

authority, the dissertation additionally considers how the public co-operation of these women was linked to nation-building projects.

The institutional structure of the organization guaranteed the Local Councils autonomy in determining issues of relevance and concern. Local constituents determined which issues should be brought forward at the Annual Meetings for further discussion, debate and action. So, it is fair to say that the National Council may have functioned merely as a clearing house or umbrella organization for the Local chapters. However, I wish suggest that the National organization was symbolically and materially significant for its attempts to unite the nation's women and for its claims to be a representative voice for them. Through participation in the National Council, women envisioned themselves as a collectivity motivated not by individual beliefs or concerns, but by the conviction that their work would benefit the nation. At the first Annual Meeting of the National Council in 1894, Julia Drummond, Council member from Montreal, gave voice to the unifying power of this National assemblage of women: "Our purpose is that we should grow in love, and mutual understanding in mental breadth and range of vision, that we should by association with others lose all the narrow provincialism of self" (NCWC, 1894: 221). It is this attempt to participate in the world outside their homes, their families and their communities, to shake off their "individuality" to become representatives of a collectivity, that motivates my analysis of the National Council.

### **Linguistic Tensions: The Fédération Nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste**

This focus on the National Council offers a critical investigation of the issues that motivated the English-speaking members of the organization. From the years 1893 to 1907, Francophone women participated in the National Council through the English-speaking Montreal Local Council of Women (Lavigne et al., 1979: 73). However, the organization's Anglophone and largely Protestant composition was untenable for Francophone Catholics. Dumont (2000) suggests that in addition to these religious differences, there was a degree of political and cultural hostility between English-speaking and French-speaking women.

An invitation from the Anglophones to their French-Canadian counterparts to celebrate the victory by the British over France in Trafalgar was the final straw. The Quebec feminists launched a new organization, called the Fédération nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste (86).

Created in 1907 by Marie Gérin-Lajoie and Caroline Béique, the Fédération Nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste "was the first large-scale association to bring together a significant number of Catholic lay women in the framework of the feminist movement" (Lavigne et al., 1979: 72). This creation of a parallel structure for Francophone women suggests the extent to which the National Council of Women faced significant hurdles in its attempts to represent all Canadian women. Furthermore, the "two solitudes" of Anglophone and Francophone feminism suggests the extent to which a belief in the power of "organized womanhood" may have functioned as a convenient fiction, an example of "strategic communication" intended to shore up support for women's participation in Canadian public life. Indeed, the extent to which Council's faith in "organized

womanhood” may have covered over ideological and political differences among its members is a central theme of investigation in the dissertation.

But what remains significant about the formation of the National Council is its stated mission to provide an opportunity for women to participate in Canadian public life. I argue that the Council’s formation is an important moment in the mobilization of white, middle-class, Anglo-Saxon women as the moral conscience and compass of the nation. This process is deeply imbedded with attempts to establish the English-speaking middle-class as the moral and political voice of the nation. While organizations such as the National Council expanded the public sphere to include the activities and interests of women, this expansion was accompanied by a subsequent contraction in gender ideology which naturalized women’s feminized and gendered position within the home. Additionally, the emergence of white, middle-class, Anglo-Saxon women as moral and cultural exemplars of the nation resulted in the marginalization of Francophone, rural, farm and working-class women.

### **Women’s Place in the Nation**

The preceding discussion has situated the formation of the National Council of Women within the context of Canadian women’s public activism at the turn of the twentieth century. The available literature on the emergence of the “first wave” of the women’s movement in Canada has offered a rich analysis of the interrelationships of gender identity, class position and nation-building in the construction of the woman citizen. The creation of the National Council

represents an important historical moment in the constitution of white, middle-class women as moral exemplars for the nation. The formation of the National Council of Women of Canada in 1893 was shaped by the history of women's attempts to carve out a space for their public participation. Refusing to endorse a specific religious affiliation, and taking a moderate approach to "political" issues, the Council presented itself as a civic organization in an emergent Canadian public sphere. Concerned to create, shape and disseminate "women's public opinion" on issues of concern, Council sought to ensure a role for women in Canadian public life. This role was predicated not only on women's privatized identities as wives and mothers, but also on a belief in the unifying power of "organized womanhood."

The following chapters illustrate how women's identities as wives and mothers were central in the creation of new social subjectivities that sought to widen the range of issues and debates circulating in the public sphere. Focusing specifically on the National Council's position on the issues of woman suffrage, women's education, and the problem of "pernicious" literature, the following chapters illustrate how new social subjectivities were created for the middle-class women who participated in the National Council. Beginning with the unquestioned role of women as moral guardians of the home, Council discourses sought to expand the sphere in which women were able to wield influence. Council discourses on women's roles in the nation created a definition of "public-spirited women" as moral exemplars and as representatives of the public good. Central to this analysis is an understanding of gender identity as constructed

through a variety of discourses and practices. To this end, the following chapters investigate the concept of gender as a “generalized form of communication” that both enables and constrains women’s public participation.

Chapter two provides an overview and analysis of theoretical literature on communicative action, civil society and the “problem” of including women. Beginning with a discussion of Jürgen Habermas’s *The Theory of Communicative Action*, the chapter queries the applicability of his critical theory to an assessment of feminist and women’s movements. Chapter three applies this theoretical framework to a detailed discussion of the National Council of Women as a “discursive” public in Canadian society. This chapter demonstrates the “dual function” of the Council in creating a collective identity of and for Canadian women and encouraging their participation in a larger public sphere. Chapter four offers a detailed analysis of the National Council’s approach to the issue of woman suffrage, focusing on the organization’s vision of women’s citizenship. Chapter five assesses the National Council’s approach to the various issues involved with women’s education. From adding domestic science training to elementary curricula, to having female representatives on school boards, the Council offered an analysis of women’s contribution to the educational system. Chapter six considers the Council’s campaign against the “pernicious” literature of crime stories and “penny dreadfuls.” This chapter details the process by which Council members attempted to encourage the Canadian public to read a “better class” of novels. Lastly, the dissertation concludes with a discussion of the significance of this form of communication in Canada.

**Chapter Two**  
**Gender, Influence and Communication**  
**Theorizing Civil Society and the National Council of Women**

---

This chapter situates my analysis of the National Council of Women within contemporary theories about feminist movements and civil society. Engaging with the critical social theory of Jürgen Habermas, feminist theories of civil society, and the “problem” of including women, this chapter seeks to establish a theoretical framework for an analysis of the discursive practices of the National Council of Women of Canada. Beginning with a discussion of Habermas’s critical theory outlined in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, I analyze whether it allows for an analysis of the Canadian women’s movement at the turn of the twentieth century. Drawing on the arguments of critical feminist theorists such as Fraser (1995), Cohen (1995), this chapter foregrounds the articulation and reproduction of gender identity in Habermas’s framework. Situating my analysis of the National Council of Women within contemporary theories of civil society, this discussion interrogates the issues involved with including women in civil society. For contemporary theorists like Fraser and Cohen, Habermas’s critical theory, if subject to feminist theorizing, allows for a critical assessment of the dual process of women’s movements. As they note, historic and contemporary feminist movements have attempted to unite women, formulate a collective identity amongst them, and generate consensus on issues of concern. But such movements are additionally concerned to engage with established structures of power, hoping to increase women’s equality and democratize society.

This chapter additionally considers the historical investigations of women in public, such as those undertaken by Landes (1988; 1995) and Ryan (1990; 1992). Specifically concerned with interrogating the processes by which women have traditionally been excluded from the formal domains of power, both Landes and Ryan suggest that such historic exclusions continue to have ramifications for contemporary theories of women's citizenship. Similarly concerned with developing an understanding of civil society that includes women, political theorists Dean (1992) and Pateman (1983; 1992) interrogate how classical definitions of citizenship and equality have served to devalue and domesticate women's contributions to the polity.

This chapter establishes the theoretical framework for my subsequent analysis of the National Council of Women of Canada. Chapter three will apply this theoretical discussion to an analysis of the National Council as a discursive public, paying particular attention to its dual process of uniting women and formulating a collective identity for them and channeling their energies toward a wider public. This chapter engages with feminist critical theory and civil society to query whether such literature can explain the politics of various feminist movements, and specifically, the role and function of the National Council. This chapter first offers a brief discussion of Habermas's critical theory and the various feminist critiques of his distinction between system and lifeworld. I then consider the feminist theoretical literature on civil society and the necessity of including women. The chapter concludes with a discussion on how this literature informs my analysis of the National Council of Women.

### **Cultural Modernity and the Promise of Rationality**

In the two volumes of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Jürgen Habermas (1984; 1987) postulates a theory of rationality that is universal in its application, and is not dependent on the concept of the individual moral actor situated at an Archimedean standpoint (McCarthy, 1984: viii). Modern society is characterized by the development of the different spheres of science, morality, and art, and each of these spheres have internal validity claims. Cultural modernity “carries with it a potential for increased self-reflection (and decentered subjectivity) regarding all dimensions of action and world relations,” (Cohen, 1995: 58) and depends upon the development of communicative and consensual means of resolving conflicts. For Habermas, this “rationalization” of the lifeworld puts added pressure on language as the medium of reaching understanding.

In a rationalized lifeworld the need for achieving understanding is met less and less by a reservoir of traditionally certified interpretations immune from criticism; at the level of a completely decentered understanding of the world, the need for consensus must be met more and more frequently by risky, because rationally motivated, agreement (1984: 340).

Social actions must be coordinated through communicative action, where participants agree to coordinate their actions consensually through common situation definitions, the provision of good reasons, and the guarantee inherent in redeeming validity claims for utterances. Habermas argues that the rationalization of the lifeworld, which he defines as subjecting traditionally-based institutions to the process of communicative action, “loads (and overloads) the mechanism of reaching understanding with a growing need for coordination” (1984: 341).

### **Dualistic Social Theory: System and Lifeworld**

Habermas postulates a dualistic theory of society comprised by system and lifeworld, in which the actions of individuals are coordinated in different ways. The system is composed of two sub-systems: the administrative state and the official economy. These sub-systems coordinate the actions of individuals via the “media” of money and power. What is significant about these forms of action coordination is that they are not predicated upon communicatively-achieved consensus, but rather on instrumental and strategic actions (Cohen, 1995: 58). At the same time that society develops increasing system complexity, there is also the development of communicatively coordinated institutions within the lifeworld that serve to bind individuals together in social and cultural groups. The lifeworld, then, stands as an egalitarian and potentially democratic counter-balance to the system. But Habermas argues that modern society is characterized by the domination of system imperatives at the expense of the development of the lifeworld. Thus, the communicative potential of the lifeworld is often short-circuited by the intrusion of “system imperatives.”

Fraser (1995) argues that there are additional distinctions at play in Habermas's dualistic theory. Both the system and the lifeworld each have public and private spheres. The system is divided into the administrative state, a public institution, and the official economy, a private sphere of economic transactions free from state intervention (31). The private sphere of the lifeworld is comprised by the nuclear family, which links the lifeworld to the official economy through the role of worker and consumer. The public sphere of the lifeworld is linked to the

administrative state through the role of citizen, soldier, or taxpayer (Habermas, 1987: 394; Fraser, 1995: 31-32). Not only are there distinctions between system and lifeworld, but additional public-private distinctions within these domains. There is a public-private distinction between the state and the economy at the systems level, and there is a public-private distinction within the lifeworld between the private sphere of the family, and the public sphere of public opinion formation (Fraser, 1995: 32).

### **Protest Potentials and New Social Movements**

Lastly, Habermas locates in new social movements situated “at the seams between system and lifeworld” contradictory potentials for emancipation. While institutions in civil society can serve to further introduce system imperatives into areas of the lifeworld, there is also emancipatory potential in the development of social, cultural, or political institutions that seek to channel influence from the lifeworld into areas of the state or the official economy (Cohen, 1995: 58; Fraser, 1995: 44; Habermas, 1987: 392-396). The protest potentials of new social movements are ambiguous because, according to Habermas, their potential for emancipation is often offset by their “particularist” character and propensity for “resistance and withdrawal” (Habermas, 1987: 393). Habermas argues that most new social movements (with the exceptions of the Civil Rights movement and the feminist movement) are defensive in character, concerned with “stemming formally organized domains of action for the sake of communicatively structured domains, and not at conquering new territory” (1987: 393).

Acknowledging that modern society is characterized by the influence of system imperatives on the lifeworld, Habermas contends that his theory of communicative action provides an opportunity to locate the potentials for resistance and protest within the lifeworld. In his brief discussion of a variety of new social movements, Habermas differentiates movements with emancipatory potential from movements characterized by “resistance and withdrawal” (1987: 393). He argues that the new social movements of feminism, civil rights, gay rights, youth protest and environmentalism, “arise in domains of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization” (1987: 392). Habermas’s discussion of the feminist movement characterizes it as standing “in the tradition of bourgeois-socialist liberation movements,” which has both an emancipatory character and a defensive one. The feminist movement’s struggle for women’s equality links it to “bourgeois-socialist liberation movements” through the values of universal human rights and equality. But the focus upon liberation for women renders the movement “particularist” and suggests a potential of withdrawal and retreat (1987: 393-94).

### **Public and Private Spheres: Feminist Critiques of Critical Theory**

Feminist scholars Fraser (1995) and Cohen (1995) have both taken issue with Habermas’s characterization of the feminist movement, suggesting that the “dual logic” of feminism as emancipatory and feminism as defensive is misleading. Fraser, for example, argues that Habermas’s criticism of the withdrawal of feminism into identity politics misses the point: that women’s “retreat” into spaces

divorced from male dominance and supremacy is an essential element in constructing collective identity and group solidarity. She further contends that Habermas's diagnosis of the reactionary potential of new social movements suggests that there is virtually no opportunity for such organizations to influence the system. Rather, in Habermas's view, these protests are merely defensive reactions to the influence of "system imperatives" on the lifeworld. These criticisms are also taken up by Cohen, who argues that Habermas fails to realize the potential of his social theory. She argues that his theory needs to be supplemented by an analysis of the various structures of civil society. Habermas's analysis of the lifeworld is inadequately theorized because he does not link the domains of culture, society, and personality to "the positive side of the institutions and organizations within civil and political society" (Cohen, 1995: 62).

This chapter considers the applicability of Habermas's critical theory in providing for an analysis of the discursive and communicative actions of the National Council of Women of Canada. Specifically engaging with feminist critiques of his focus on system and lifeworld, I argue that by incorporating a feminist concern with gender and the reproduction of dominance and subordination, Habermas's theory does offer a nuanced analysis of the protest potentials of new social movements. The critiques offered by Fraser and Cohen, suggest that contemporary critical theory must be able to uncover and critique gender inequalities and how these inequalities are expressed in public and private roles. While Fraser's assessment of Habermas's work finds that his gender blindness compromises his entire project, Cohen finds that Habermas's

analysis of the lifeworld as providing the opportunity for democratizing the system is a valuable contribution to critical theory. Such an analysis can allow for a critical and engaged analysis of new social movements such as feminism.

Beginning with these feminist critiques of Habermas's dualistic framework, I argue that the categories of system and lifeworld are useful for a critical and historical analysis of the National Council. Paying particular attention to the lifeworld as comprised by culture, society, and the person, I argue that such a concept expands our understanding of the relationship between public and private spheres. This particular focus provides a point from which we can begin to interrogate the operation of gender identity, collective identity and social solidarity in discourses created by Council members. As I suggested in chapter one, through participation in the National Council, a specific group of Canadian women were able to discursively construct a collective identity, to understand themselves as gendered political actors, and to orient their speech and their actions toward a wider public. In this sense, the members of the National Council aimed to conquer new territory for a specific class of women in the public sphere. An assessment of the extent to which the National Council can be conceptualized as part of an "emancipatory" movement is somewhat more of a challenge. Indeed, Council members did attempt to create public space for themselves, for their collective organizing, and from which they could attempt to influence political parties and processes. However, since the organization maintained that women's primary and natural domain remained the home, it did not seek to alter those structures that contributed to women's subordination and

secondary status. Indeed, as will be demonstrated in the subsequent discussions in this dissertation, Council members sought to create public spaces for the expression and exercise of women's influence. However, the question remains whether Council members sought the emancipation of all women, or whether they were more concerned to ensure that the "right type" of women had public influence. As the following chapters will illustrate, Council's contribution to an "emancipatory" movement of and for Canadian women was ambiguous at best.

Council members' attempts to create this public role for middle-class women involved invoking their moral authority, prestige and their capacities for moral suasion – qualities that Habermas and Cohen define as "generalized forms of communication." This analysis reveals the extent to which middle-class, white, Protestant women attempted to represent themselves as the public face, and collective voice, of organized womanhood.

### **Gendered Spaces: System and Lifeworld**

In her extensive critique of Habermas's critical theory, Fraser (1995) acknowledges that his model offers a sophisticated analysis of the distinctions and connections between system and lifeworld. However, she contends that this framework is seriously marred by gender blindness. She finds that the "roles" invoked by Habermas as representative of our public and private identities are gendered roles. The role of "worker," which links the private sphere of the family to the official economy, is ideologically, culturally, and statistically, a male role. While increasing numbers of women are entering the paid workforce, masculine

identity is still heavily tied to assuming the breadwinner role. "Masculinity is in large part a matter of leaving home each day for a place of paid work and returning with a wage that provides for one's dependents" (1995: 33). The labour struggles for a "family wage" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were predicated upon this conception of masculinity.

This was a struggle for a wage conceived not as a payment to a genderless individual for the use of labour power, but rather as a payment to a man for the support of his economically dependent wife and children – a conception, of course, that legitimized the practice of paying women less for equal or comparable work (1995: 33).

This masculine identity role is further reinforced through the "vexed and strained character" of women's work (33). Drawing on the insights offered by Pateman, Fraser contends that women are not absent in the paid workforce, but that they are present differently. Women are often employed in traditionally feminized "service" occupations such as secretaries, child care workers, salespersons, and the sexualized occupations of the sex trade (exotic dancers, prostitutes). Additionally, they are employed in the helping professions, where they can utilize their specific "mothering" skills as nurses, social workers, child care workers, and primary school teachers. Hence, women's employment tends to be regarded as an extension of their private identities. This is further compounded by their designation as "working wives" and "working mothers," where they are presented, first and foremost, as wives and/or mothers, who also happen to work outside the home and earn a supplemental income (1995: 33). Fraser asserts that these differences between men's work and women's work

“testif[ies] to the conceptual dissonance between femininity and the worker role in classical capitalism” (1995: 33).

The additional role that links the nuclear family to the official economy is the consumer role, which, Fraser asserts, has a “feminine subtext.” The gendered division of domestic labour has assigned women the task of purchasing goods and services for the family. Hence, the gender subtext of these roles links a masculine role with earning money, and a feminine role with purchasing the products for domestic consumption (1995: 34). Fraser also finds a significant omission in Habermas's conceptual schema: he offers no place for the childrearing role in his separation between public and private spheres. This traditionally feminine role has specific consequences for the position of women in classical capitalism. This public/private dichotomy has removed women from the public spheres of politics and public opinion formation, and additionally removes their contributions to the official economy. Women's unpaid work in the home comprises both symbolic and material reproduction through the raising and socialization of future generations, the creation and maintenance of cultural traditions, and the creation of a future labour force. Classical capitalism is premised upon women's subordination within the home, and Habermas's distinction between system and lifeworld, and the various public and private roles enabled by these spheres, does not thematize “the importance of gender identity as an ‘exchange medium’” (1995: 34).

The worker and consumer roles that link the lifeworld to the official economy are not only involved in the exchange of money, but also in the

reproduction of gender identity and appropriate public and private roles. As for the citizen and client roles that link the lifeworld to the state, these are also gendered roles. Through Habermas's work on public debate and discourse beginning with *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989) and including his more recent work *Between Facts and Norms* (1996), "the citizen is centrally a participant in political debate and public opinion formation. This means that citizenship, in his view, depends crucially on the capacities for consent and speech, the ability to participate on a par with others in dialogue" (Fraser, 1995: 34-35). But these capacities and abilities have been historically problematic with respect to women's participation in public dialogue. Fraser asserts that contemporary research on the dynamics of conversation between husbands and wives "shows that men tend to control conversations, determining what topics are pursued, whereas women do more 'interaction work' like asking questions and providing verbal support" (1995: 29). Fraser further contends that women's relationship to notions of "consent" is also problematic, given "both popular and legal opinion widely hold that when a woman says 'no' she means 'yes'" (1995: 35). For these reasons, it is difficult to conceptualize women in a citizen role. This difficulty is compounded by the other male-defined notion of citizenship: soldiering. The soldier is understood as the man willing to die to protect his country, as well as those individuals (women, children, the elderly) unable to protect themselves (1995: 35).

Habermas's blindness to the operation of gender identity in his categorical framework results in serious conceptual blockages for understanding the nature

of male domination and female subordination in early and late capitalist societies. However, Fraser argues that a gender-sensitive reading of Habermas reveals “that feminine and masculine gender identity run like pink and blue threads through the areas of unpaid work, state administration, and citizenship, as well as through the domain of familial and sexual relations” (1995: 36). She argues that any critical theory of society needs to be able to account for the reproduction of social inequalities, including, but not limited to, gender inequality. This gender sensitive reading, Fraser asserts, has normative political implications: “it suggests that an emancipatory transformation of male-dominated, capitalist societies, early and late, requires a transformation of these gendered roles and of the institutions they mediate” (1995: 37).

### **System, Lifeworld and the Promise of Civil Society**

In her critique of Habermas's critical social theory, Cohen (1995) argues that his conceptualization of system and lifeworld offers intriguing possibilities for a theory of new social movements. But, in her book co-authored with Arato (1992), she contends that *The Theory of Communicative Action* suffers from a serious institutional deficit. Habermas does not ground his theory of a differentiated lifeworld within organizations and institutions that constitute civil society. Cohen takes issue with Habermas's interpretation of the political potential of new social movements as “defensive reactions against the colonization of the lifeworld” (1995: 60). While Habermas maintains that new social movements are anti-institutional because they only seek to reinterpret traditions and identities, Cohen

contends “the movements also generate new solidarities, alter the associational structure of civil society, and create a plurality of new public spaces while expanding and revitalizing spaces that are already institutionalized” (1995: 62). Habermas’s conceptualization of the subsystems of state and economy treats them as “self-referentially closed” systems and because of this, he cannot see how these can be subject to reform. “His overly rigid separation of the domains of system and lifeworld blinds him to the offensive strategies of contemporary movements aimed at creating or democratizing receptors within the subsystems” (1995: 63).

Focusing on how communicative action can be employed to explain and rejuvenate a politics of civil society, Cohen analyzes the operation of power in Habermas's theory and contends that “power does not operate only as a steering medium” (1995: 69). Rather, she postulates an understanding of power that “operates through ‘binary codes’ that transfer selectivity, expedite communication, and avoid the risks of dissention so long as they are not challenged” (1995: 69). She applies this understanding of power to maintain that “gender is a generalized form of communication, or, rather, the code of such communication. Existing gender roles ... are so constructed as to stop questioning at a supposedly unchallengeable meaning complex that is defined as ‘natural’” (1995: 70). Cohen disagrees with Fraser’s assertion that gender is another “steering medium.” She contends instead that gender must be conceptualized as a “set of codes in and through which power operates ...

Gender norms and identities are based ultimately on the intersubjective recognition of cognitive and normative validity claims" (1995: 70).

Drawing upon and expanding Fraser's analysis of the gender blindness of Habermas's theory, Cohen argues that the most significant flaw in *The Theory of Communicative Action* is the inattention to the gendered character of the roles of male breadwinner and citizen, and how these roles "emerged along with the differentiation of the market economy and the state administration" (1995: 70). This development of masculine public roles accompanied the gendering of the private sphere as the specific domain of women:

It is no accident that as the roles of male breadwinner and male citizen crystallized, a cult of domesticity emerged to provide the ideological components of the new wife and mother role ... Thus, as a generalized medium of communication, gendered power relations have been built into all of the roles developed in (a selectively rationalized) modern society (1995: 71).

The task for feminist critical theory, then, is to contest and challenge both the symbolic and the material inequalities in modern society. On the one hand, traditional gender codes and identities must be discursively challenged by social actors determined to create "new meanings and new interpretations." On the other hand, new social movements must also contest inequalities in the distribution of material resources such as money and power (1995: 70).

Taken together, these feminist critiques of Habermas's categorial distinction between system and lifeworld illustrate what is at stake for feminist critical theory. For Fraser and Cohen, central to any critical theory of society is the necessity of theorizing the reproduction of the gendered relationship of dominance and subordination. While Fraser finds that Habermas's critical theory

is compromised by his inability to elucidate the processes and structures of gender inequality, Cohen maintains that his theory must be supplemented with an analysis of associations in civil society. For Cohen, the multiple and competing institutions in civil society mediate between system and lifeworld and present the opportunity for the creation of “receptors” within the system for the communicatively achieved norms of the lifeworld. While they disagree on the applicability of Habermas’s schema for a critical understanding of feminist movements, both Fraser and Cohen postulate the existence of competing discursive publics. They contend that through discursive contestation and debate, there is the opportunity to expand the space for discussion and to potentially democratize civil society.

### **System, Lifeworld and Feminist Movements**

Cohen's feminist interrogation of Habermas's critical theory elaborates three main political goals for the feminist movement: the decolonization of civil society, the modernization of civil society, and the development of institutions in civil society that can influence the subsystems of money and power (1995: 74).

Decolonizing civil society would entail permitting the processes of juridification “only in forms that empower actors in civil society without subjecting them to administrative control.” The modernization of civil society involves the replacement of traditional patriarchal forms of power and privilege with communicatively-achieved norms and values. Lastly, developing influential institutions in civil society involves structural changes in the subsystems of

money and power in order to make them receptive to the “new identities and the newly democratized, egalitarian institutions of civil society” (74).

Conceptualizing the modern feminist movement as a project of “dual politics,” Cohen maintains that the system/lifeworld distinction is necessary for critical theory and for feminist politics.

The primary targets of the new social movements are the institutions of civil society. These movements create new associations and new publics, try to render existing institutions more egalitarian, enrich and expand public discussion in civil society and influence the existing public spaces of political society, potentially expanding these and supplementing them with additional forms of citizen participation (1995: 75).

Retaining a categorial framework that distinguishes between domains where actions are co-ordinated communicatively and domains where actions are strategic is necessary for understanding the dual logic of social movements such as feminism. “The dual logic of feminist politics thus involves a communicative, discursive politics of identity and influence that target civil and political society and an organized, strategically rational politics of inclusion and reform that is aimed at political and economic institutions” (1995: 76).

This understanding of the dual logic of feminist movements informs my analysis of the National Council of Women of Canada. The NCWC created discourses that sought to challenge the dominant mode of political representation. Arguing that women’s opinions mattered, and that male leaders required women’s input, the Council sought to alter the political domain by providing women with a public presence and political subjectivity. Once Habermas’s critical theory is subjected to feminist interrogation, and once gender

identity is foregrounded as a category of analysis, it is possible to analyze the multiple strategies of contestation and debate undertaken by the National Council. While his framework relies on a dualistic distinction between system and lifeworld, Habermas complicates this analysis through a discussion of the additional aspects of these domains. Maintaining that the lifeworld is comprised of culture, society, and the person, Habermas's framework potentially provides a rich understanding of how meaning is created, how discourses are formulated and how individuals and groups attempt to reach understanding through their various positions in these worlds.

This conceptualization of the structures of the lifeworld provides a complex and nuanced frame through which to view the communicative practices of the National Council of Women of Canada. Focusing on the composition of the lifeworld enables an analysis of the role of communication in social critique, solidarity and identity formation. Specifically, the focus on these three domains of the lifeworld enables an analysis of the multiple spheres of discourse created by the NCWC. Council members offered a critique of society and the existing state of things for limiting women to the domestic sphere and devaluing their contribution to the nation. Through Council discourses on suffrage, education and "pernicious" literature, Council women were able to criticize the legacy of male domination of public life and postulate a role for women in a new public sphere. Specifically, they created a political subjectivity for middle-class women that defined their activities as a moral responsibility, as contributing to the democratization of the nation, and as part and parcel of nation-building projects.

As noted in chapter one, the mission statement of the National Council invoked women's collectivity by addressing its membership as the "women of Canada" (NCWC, 1914: preface). Indeed, the organization envisioned its middle-class members as the representatives of "organized womanhood" and women's public opinion. Constituted by various local chapters and national associations of women, the National Council attempted to create social solidarity among women who were separated by geography, and by political and religious beliefs. Through such attempts to unify and organize the nation's women, there was the attempt to create a political culture that demanded the participation of educated, organized, "public-spirited" women. Lastly, through the creation of discourse on issues of woman suffrage, women's education and "pernicious" literature, Council members created a new political actor: the woman citizen. Through participation in the National Council, middle-class, white women were able to understand themselves as gendered political actors.

This analysis demonstrates the extent to which Council discourses were dual in focus. Not only did women attempt to bind themselves together as representatives of "organized womanhood," they also sought to secure a public role for themselves as citizens and as moral exemplars. This emergence of the "woman citizen" was dependent upon two trajectories: the movement of "domestic" or "feminine" qualities into public life, and the creation of spaces in public life for women's participation. Two types of expansion are undertaken in these processes: the private sphere becomes an issue of public concern and

national significance, and the public sphere is extended to enable, facilitate, or respond to women's concerns.

A central concern of this analysis, then, is the extent to which Council members actively created a role for themselves in the political life of the nation. Discursively constructing themselves as "mothers of the nation," Council members attempted to create a new social subjectivity for women and to expand their sphere of influence from the home to the nation at large. While this analysis focuses on the ways in which women participated in Canadian society, it additionally demonstrates how these rhetorical strategies had limited discursive and political reach, and ultimately recuperated such activism within the domestic sphere. A feminist analysis of Habermas's critical theory demonstrates how gender as a generalized form of communication enabled middle- and upper middle-class Canadian women to participate in public life. At the same time however, such gendered discourses limited women's participation, constructed a "feminized" role for women in public life, and foreshortened debate about the role of women as political actors in Canadian society.

The analysis taken up in the following chapters of the dissertation shows how Council discourses on woman suffrage, women's education and "pernicious" literature constructed an image of Canadian women as moral guardians of the family and the nation. Such discourses articulated a public role for women premised on their subjective identities as wives and mothers. The rhetoric of maternal feminism constructed the moral, private and familial domain as the natural preserve of women. Their participation in Canadian public life was

understood as an expansion of the moral domain into the domain of official, male-dominated politics, rather than as an expansion of women's formal political rights. These discourses were predicated on assumptions about the historical, current and future position of women as essentially privatized individuals. Through invoking women's "natural" identities as mothers and care-givers, Council members sought to expand women's influence, duties and responsibilities, but they did so through drawing on and reinforcing the established consensus regarding women's social and private roles.

### **Women, Participation and Civil Society**

As the above discussion illustrates, and as several feminist critics have argued, women were not absent from public life. Rather, paraphrasing Fraser (1995), they were "present differently." Feminist historians and political theorists have stressed that modern society and political theory are grounded on the separation between public and private spheres, and the relegation of women to the domain of the private and non-political (Kerber, 1988; Pateman, 1983). For contemporary feminists, a central task for political theory is the attempt to include women in civil society and public life. This involves a reconceptualization of civil society to enable the inclusion of previously marginalized and excluded groups. For Pateman (1992), civil society is characterized by the constitutive exclusion of women from the official domains of politics. While women were incorporated into civil society, they were "incorporated differently from men, the 'individuals' and 'citizens' of political theory; women were incorporated as subordinates, as the

'different' sex, as 'women'" (19). While my discussion of the National Council illustrates how women attempted to provide themselves with a public role, it also demonstrates the gendered nature of that role. Women were able to claim public space, but only through the articulation of their privatized identities. They were not able to claim such space as free, self-determining and disinterested individuals, but rather as dependent, relational and interested women.

In her discussion of women's attempts to conquer public space, Landes (1995) highlights the inherent danger posed by women's public activities. Specifically referring to women's attempts to organize in public during the French Revolution, she argues that such participation threatened the fundamental constitution of the public sphere as the specific preserve of male citizens. Hence, women's presence in public was problematic from the outset and presented a grave risk to the moral, political, and social order:

When women during the French Revolution and the nineteenth century attempted to organize in public on the basis of their interests, they risked violating the constitutive principles of the bourgeois public sphere: in the place of one, they substituted the many; in place of disinterestedness, they revealed themselves to have an interest (98).

So, while women have participated in the public sphere, their participation was cast as particularistic and gendered. For Landes, these characteristics of women's participation reveals a conceptual problem at the heart of contemporary theories about the democratic potential of the liberal public sphere. Historically, it served to limit women's participation, exclude their speech and undercut their social authority.

This analysis of the gendered aspects of the public sphere is also illustrated in the historically specific example of the United States in the nineteenth century. In her work on “women in public,” Ryan (1990; 1992) engages with Habermas’s (1989) model of the public sphere and concludes that his model cannot adequately theorize women’s public participation. Stressing such principles as rational critical debate, Habermas’s theory of the public sphere is unable to account for the raucous nature of American political life in the 1800s. According to Ryan (1992),

this urban public found its social base in amorphous groupings of citizens aggregated according to ethnicity, class, race, pet cause, and party affiliation. These widespread, diverse, and intersecting political conventions were a popular enactment of the principle of open access to public debate on matters of general interest (264).

Thus, for Ryan, the public sphere was always characterized by multiplicity, contestation and a lack of unity.

The feminist critiques offered by Landes (1988; 1995), Fraser (1992) and Ryan (1990; 1992) illustrate the extent to which women cannot simply be added to the public. Rather, the liberal model of the public sphere is premised upon the gendered distinction between public and private roles. As Pateman (1983) notes,

liberal principles cannot simply be universalized to extend to women in the public sphere without raising an acute problem about the patriarchal structure of private life ... the spheres are integrally related and ... women’s full and equal membership in public life is impossible without changes in the domestic sphere (293).

For Fraser (1989; 1992), Dean (1992; 1996) and Cohen (1992; 1995), it is not only the domestic sphere that requires a radical transformation. Indeed, the “dual

politics” of contemporary and historic feminist movements is characterized by the attempt to transform domestic relations and the political and economic structures that reinforce and solidify women’s secondary status.

### **Inclusion and Recognition: Women and Civil Society**

Jodi Dean (1992) contends that feminist movements are centrally concerned with securing inclusion and recognition for women in civil society. Summarizing three dominant forms of feminist critique, she argues that women’s role in civil society can be thematized through notions of exclusion and recognition (382).

Practical exclusion can have either weak or strong functions. Weak practical exclusion occurs when there are economic or legal barriers to participation.

Strong practical exclusion refers to the symbolic and cultural limitations on the notion of inclusion. Constitutive exclusion, on the other hand, means “there is something inherent within the categories of civil society themselves which prevent full inclusion” (383). She postulates recognition as the “correlative concept of inclusion” which refers to the “characteristics by means of which social membership is attributed to individual persons” (383).

Dean outlines three types of recognition: universal or juridical recognition is secured by the extension of political and legal rights; attributive or role recognition refers to an individual's membership within a social community which establishes the basis of their recognition as members of society; and particular recognition appreciates the differences between individuals: “individuals can only

be understood as social members when their particular needs and experiences are taken into account" (383).

Corresponding to these three types of recognition, feminist critiques of civil society have focused on, to varying degrees, women's practical exclusion in weak and strong senses and women's constitutive exclusion from civil society. Early feminist interventions in public life, according to Dean, focused on "women's practical exclusion in the weak sense" (383), and proposed the extension of formal political and economic rights to women. An example of this is the mobilization for the suffrage, women's access to education, and the right to own property.

The second type of feminist critique of civil society focuses on women's practical exclusion in the strong sense. "This type of critique draws attention to the cultural interpretations which have served to further women's subordination" (384). An example is the feminist critique of the division between public and private spheres that underlies contract theory. Feminist theorists such as Carole Pateman have argued that these divisions have served to keep "private" issues such as child care, sexuality, reproductive rights, and violence against women from entering public debate. Additionally, traditional political theory has tended to define women as passive, emotional and dependent, constructing an image of women as lacking the specific qualities of rationality, independence and self-assertion necessary for public participation (384-85).

The third type of feminist critique builds upon the critique of the public/private dichotomy and argues that this division has served to constitutively

exclude women from participation in the public sphere of civil society. "Because the ideas of publicity, justice, and rationality are formed in opposition to notions of privacy, the good life and emotionality, these conceptions cannot serve as regulatory ideals for women" (386).

Dean argues that any emancipatory politics has to focus on particular recognition, which acknowledges the different cultural traditions of social actors, allows them to be thematized in public discourse, and sheds light on ways in which certain groups have been prevented from participating in the public sphere.

By bringing to light and thematizing certain aspects of their traditions and the traditions of others, agents in civil society come not simply to a better understanding of the differences among members but also to recognize those cultural interpretations which practically exclude groups and individuals from full democratic participation (1992: 398).

While she is specifically referring to contemporary feminist and democratic movements, Dean's analysis of the varieties of feminist critiques is instructive for an analysis of the discursive practices of the National Council. On the one hand, the feminist movements of the late nineteenth century were specifically concerned with including women on a practical, legal, and juridical level. Fundamentally concerned with women's legal status, their enfranchisement, their education, and their status as property holders, "first wave" feminism in Canada was motivated by the attempt to secure specific political and legal rights. But, at the same time, women active in the National Council were concerned with challenging the cultural interpretations that served to limit women's public participation. In this sense, "first wave" feminism attempted to redress women's

practical exclusion in the strong sense. Despite political organization that distinguished between public and private spheres, Council members thematized “domestic” issues as relevant for society as a whole. They argued that it was through women’s supposed “confinement” to the domestic sphere that they developed an expertise and authority on these issues that should find public expression and representation. Women’s activism on temperance and “white slavery,” for example, demonstrated the extent to which they were additionally concerned with challenging the cultural roadblocks to their participation. Such arguments offered a critique of a social and political system that attempted to remove such issues from public debate.

The consideration of women’s constitutive exclusion from civil society demonstrates the limits of the National Council as a mechanism for including women in Canadian public life. As the arguments of Kealey (1979), Roberts (1979), Mitchinson (1979), Bacchi (1982; 1983), and Strong-Boag (1976) have demonstrated, female activists at the turn of the twentieth century reinforced, rather than challenged, the gendered division between public and private domains. In so doing, the “first wave” feminist critique of a political and social system that devalued women stopped short of challenging their constitutive exclusion. First wave feminists sought to secure juridical and role recognition for Canadian women as women, and specifically as mothers, but did not seek to challenge the political or social structures that relegated them to a subordinate position in society. As Strong-Boag (1976) notes, the Council members’ reliance on “maternal feminism”

meant that the NCWC made little effort to assist women to a broader understanding of themselves. Nor, with such a preconception, could it always lobby unquestioningly for equal participation in every aspect of community life. So long as the emphasis lay on sexual differences rather than similarities it would be easy to relegate women to 'special,' often in practice inferior, roles in the economic, political and intellectual world" (182-83).

But I want to suggest that this "maternal feminism" also provided the impetus for women's collective organizing. By invoking women's identities as wives and mothers, Council members provided a discursive frame through which women could be organized as a public body. Women's maternal duties and responsibilities became the banner under which they could unite and work toward common action for home and nation. But the idealization of their privatized identity also constructed the limits under which they could participate in Canadian public life.

### **Equality, Difference and Maternal Politics**

The difficulties of including women in theories of civil society and citizenship have revolved around women's "difference" and distance from the "universal" characteristics of men's citizenship. For Pateman (1992) "childbirth and motherhood have symbolized the natural capacities that set women apart from politics and citizenship; motherhood and citizenship, in this perspective, like difference and equality, are mutually exclusive" (18). Indeed, for Pateman and other feminist political theorists like Dietz (1985), DiQuinzio (1999), Prokhovnik (1998) and Scott (1988b), the tension between equality and difference is the issue at the heart of attempts to incorporate women into politics and citizenship.

While the history of the women's movement has been largely interpreted as attempting to secure for women the same rights as men, it is important to note the extent to which female activists articulated women's difference as a defence of their participation. Pateman (1992) notes that "women have demanded both equal civil and political rights, and that their difference from men should be acknowledged in their citizenship" (17-18). Similarly, Dow (1991) argues that "the womanhood rationale" in the rhetoric of American temperance activist, Frances Willard, "created a role for women that did not threaten true womanhood, that conservative women were not reluctant to attempt, and that did not threaten traditional males" (301). Thus, in women's early attempts to participate in the public sphere, their difference from, and moral superiority to, men was the very justification for their involvement. But, as Pateman and Dow point out, such gendered arguments resulted in conceptual blockages towards understanding women as equal citizens. Dow concludes that the

perpetuation of the ideas that women should be more concerned for others than themselves, that they were primarily responsible for the nurturing of children, and that they were morally and religiously superior was of little help to future feminists forced to combat these perceptions in the battle for full social equality and personal fulfillment (305).

Pateman (1992) further contends that the irony of "difference" arguments is that while motherhood and childrearing have traditionally been invoked to preclude women's political participation, "motherhood has also been constructed as a political status" (18-19). Indeed, as noted previously, the concept of civil society is predicated upon the gendered distinction between public and private spheres, masculine and feminine domains. Thus, women have been included

differently in civil society. Women's political duties and contributions "derive from their difference from men, notably their capacity for motherhood" (19). The necessary political import of women's maternity was the "bearing and rearing sons who embodied republican virtues" (20). The problem inherent in such attempts to differentiate women's citizenship is that, in practice, a choice must be made between "equality" and "difference". As Pateman (1992) notes, "to demand 'equality' is to strive for equality with men ... which means that women must become (like) men." But the reliance on difference is equally problematic because "to insist ... that women's distinctive attributes, capacities and activities be revalued and treated as a contribution to citizenship is to demand the impossible" (20).

In part responding to political theorists Elshtain (1981) and Ruddick (1980) for their recuperation of mothering as a basis for women's citizenship, Pateman (1992) argues that such attempts remain mired in the equality versus difference debate. She maintains that the central problem with "patriarchal" definitions of citizenship (i.e. those articulated with respect to equality versus difference) is that they focus on women's "difference" and obscure women's subordination (28). The task for feminist political theory is not to postulate a gender-specific form of citizenship for women, but to "transform the relationship between 'equality' and 'difference'" (27).

## **Women, Civil Society and the National Council**

The critiques of Pateman (1992), Dean (1996), and Dow (1991) help to assess what is at stake in contemporary investigations into the early women's movement. While the designation of motherhood has been deployed to secure increased political rights for women, such gendered discourse also simultaneously reasserts women's difference and often their subordination. My intention in this chapter has been to survey contemporary theoretical literature on civil society and the position of women therein in the hopes of elucidating the applicability of such literature for an historical case study of the National Council of Women of Canada. While the some of the critics discussed in this chapter (Fraser, Dean, Cohen, Pateman) have oriented their discussions toward a consideration of contemporary feminist movements, I want to suggest that such theoretical work is relevant for this historically-specific analysis of the National Council. Drawing on the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas and feminist critiques of his work, I have argued that the National Council attempted to expand the public spaces for women's participation. To that end, the National Council sought to alter public and political culture in order to facilitate the participation of middle-class female reformers. Additionally, and following the arguments of Fraser (1995) and Cohen (1995), I discussed the "dual process" of feminist movements. On the one hand, feminist movements strive to unify women, attempt to create a collective identity and to generate consensus on issues of general concern. On the other, such movements also attempt to direct women's energies to the public sphere to contribute to the democratization of society. It is this analysis of the

role and function of contemporary and historic feminist movements that can help us to assess the strategies of the National Council. For the feminist theorists discussed in this chapter, a central goal for any feminist movement is the eradication of women's subordination. To the extent that such subordination is rooted in perceptions of women's difference from, and inequality to, men, feminist movements must challenge the process by which women's difference is invoked to deprive them of equality and rights. Such tensions between women's difference and their equality characterize the discourses produced by women active in the National Council. Indeed, as the following chapters illustrate, Council discourses were fundamentally concerned with securing legitimacy for women's public participation without sacrificing their "womanliness." The extent to which such discourses may have compounded women's separate, different, and subordinate status is a central theme explored in the following discussions.

The subsequent chapters of this dissertation seek to elucidate the processes by which members of the National Council sought to facilitate the participation of middle-class women in Canadian public life. Focusing on the organization's position as a discursive public in Canadian society, and providing an in-depth analysis of various discourses produced by Council members, the following analysis details the creation of a collective identity for middle-class women as the nation's moral exemplars.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **Representing the Nation's Women**

#### **The Dual Function of the National Council**

---

*The woman who aspires to make home a place for rest after work and for strengthening before labor, a centre of holy associations and inspiring memories, has need herself to be in touch with every side of our manifold life (Ishbel Aberdeen, NCWC, 1894: 12).*

Addressing the National Council of Women at its first Annual Meeting in 1894, Ishbel Aberdeen, wife of Canada's Governor-General and president of the National Council, outlined the contradictions involved in women's participation in public life. Concerned to reinforce the role of the home in providing for the moral strength and sustenance of future generations, Aberdeen contended that women must involve themselves in the world outside their homes. But an additional concern for Council members was the shape and form that such activism should take. By what means should women involve themselves with "every side of our manifold life"? By what and whose authority could women participate in public and contribute to the public discussion of issues of general concern? For Aberdeen, and for women active in Council, women's roles as mothers provided them with the expertise and moral authority to assume public roles and responsibilities. Through the articulation of a discourse of "mothering," Council members legitimated and constrained women's public participation.

This chapter builds on the theoretical framework established in chapter two by discussing the National Council as an example of a "discursive public" in Canadian society. Employing the feminist theories of Felski (1989) and Fraser (1992), I argue that the National Council employed a dual process of collective

organizing and public influence. On the one hand, the Council sought to bind women together and form them into an engaged and articulate public in Canadian society. In this respect, it sought to construct a collective identity for women as mothers, help-mates and moral guardians. On the other hand, the Council additionally sought to engage with political leaders and policy-makers in the attempt to offer and express “women’s public opinion” on issues of concern. This dual process depended upon the Council’s attempt to unite women under a banner of “mothering,” and to represent the public opinion of the nation’s women.

### **Feminist Politics and the Public Sphere**

In her book *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, Felski (1989) postulates that feminist movements have both an internal and external orientation. Providing a feminist reading of Habermas’s (1989) analysis of the bourgeois public sphere, Felski asserts that the concept of a public domain that was, in principle, accessible to all, was a powerful and useful concept for feminist theory and politics.

Confronting Habermas’s historically specific, and male dominated, theory of the rise of the public sphere, Felski argues for the existence of a “feminist public sphere.” Concerned with the creation of spaces for collective identity formation among women, she argues that the feminist public sphere has a dual logic: it is both internally and externally oriented. On the one hand, such a sphere creates a separate space for women, allows them an opportunity to debate issues of concern and to arrive at a consensus regarding appropriate responses. This internal process is complemented by the “publicist orientation” of these publics:

they additionally seek to influence public opinion, secure validity for their claims, and potentially influence the course of public policy and law (168).

Fraser's discussion on "Rethinking the Public Sphere" draws on Felski's analysis of the dual function of the feminist public sphere. Fraser (1992) contends that traditionally subordinated groups "have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics" (123). She argues that these "subaltern counterpublics" are "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (123). Conceptualizing the public sphere as constituted by a variety of competing, discursive publics, Felski and Fraser reserve an important and influential role for feminist politics. My own analysis of the National Council draws upon these understandings of the role of publics in society, but with one important difference. Rather than identify the National Council as a "feminist counterpublic," I suggest that the organization is usefully conceptualized as a "discursive public." Specifically concerned with formulating "women's public opinion" and attempting to ensure for women opportunities to speak to and influence political leaders, the National Council was not, strictly speaking, a "counter" public. Rather than challenging the common sense understanding that the home was women's primary domain, the Council instead took this for granted and used women's maternal identity and domestic preoccupations to justify their participation in the public sphere. That being said, the National Council did function as a public of and for middle-class, urban women. It sought to bring together female reformers

active on a variety of issues from woman suffrage to prison reform. It additionally sought to create “women’s public opinion” about these and other issues relevant to Canadian society. But perhaps most importantly, Council members sought to create a collective identity by which women would be able to participate in public with a degree of authority and legitimacy. That collective identity was articulated through a discourse of mothering.

This chapter argues that the formation and practices of the National Council offered women a degree of political and public authority that they had not previously enjoyed. However, because Council discourses sought to elevate women’s “maternal” functions, they stopped short of challenging the gendered relationship between dominance and subordination, and ultimately reinforced women’s connection to the home. In this sense, the discursive strategies of the National Council did not live up to the radical potential of feminist discourse outlined by Fraser and Felski. However, I want to suggest that Council members were successful in articulating a counter discourse of women’s “duties and responsibilities.” While Council members did not challenge the home as women’s primary domain, they nevertheless used women’s domestic “confinement” to imbue them with moral authority, prestige and expertise to speak publicly about issues of relevance to women and to families. Thus, while these discourses were deeply, and problematically, gendered, they nevertheless sought to expand the public sphere to allow for the participation of middle-class women.

In chapter one, I situated my analysis of the National Council in the emergence of the first wave women’s movement at the turn of the twentieth

century. As such, the National Council was an important organization that sought to facilitate women's participation in a sphere larger than the domain of the home. But, at the same time, it is important to stress that Council members intentionally constructed themselves against the public figure of the "new woman," who was thought to present a significant challenge to social order and stability. In this sense, it is difficult to conceptualize the National Council as a "feminist" organization in the sense offered by contemporary critics. However, the Council did seek to secure increased legal recognition for Canadian women and it sought to legitimize women's participation in domains of civil society. As such, it attempted to alter and expand the domain of the political and secure legitimacy for women's public participation. So, while I am reluctant to label the National Council a "feminist" organization, a reliance on these feminist arguments provides for a useful analysis of the politics of the organization.

This chapter offers an analysis of the processes by which Council members sought to construct a collective identity for women and encouraged women's participation in the public domain. Central to the following analysis is an understanding of the National Council as a discursive public that attempted to circulate knowledge regarding women's contributions to the nation. This chapter first considers how Council members defined "mothering" as a collective identity. It then considers the public exercise of women's moral influence through organizations such as the National Council. Lastly, it considers how the Council sought to present itself as the organized and representative voice of and for Canadian women.

Focusing specifically on comments and speeches by Council members that outlined the organization's mission, this chapter interrogates the organization's claims to represent the opinions, wishes, and values of the nation's women. The social prominence of the organization and specifically its president, Lady Aberdeen, enabled and supported its claims to representative status. The influence of Lady Ishbel Aberdeen, the president of the National Council from 1893-1898, looms large in the following discussion. A prominent social reformer, wife of Canada's Governor-General, and President of the International Council of Women for almost forty years, Aberdeen was a formidable presence in the work of the National Council. But, as social historians Bacchi (1983), Roberts (1979), Strong-Boag (1976), Griffiths (1993), and Cook (1995) suggest, she was also an indication of the Council's elite executive. As the wife of the Governor-General, Aberdeen herself was hardly representative of the Council's membership of "women workers." However, her social prominence was a significant factor in the Council's public legitimacy and respectability. Additionally, her vision of the Council's role in uniting the nation's women in the work of "social uplifting" furnished the organization with its initial mission. Aberdeen's status certainly illustrates the class imperatives that contributed to the ability of these middle-class reformers to claim public space. I want to suggest that it was her class position, her commitment to social reform, and her political prominence that helped shape the Council's vision of women's role in the nation.

### **Private Morality and Public Duties: Mothering as a Collective Identity**

In the first few years of the Council's existence, there was considerable debate regarding the scope and parameters of woman's sphere. Concerned to ensure that women were adequately prepared to assume public roles, Council embarked on a campaign to make "mothering" a national and public responsibility. At the first Annual Meeting of the NCWC, Aberdeen made this mission explicit.

We come together as women who are more or less alive to the high duties and opportunities which are ours in virtue of our womanhood, but who are at the same time earnestly desirous to make their work more effective for the common good by taking counsel with one another as to the carrying on of our grand women's mission (NCWC, 1894: 10-11).

From the outset, "women's mission" was understood as a direct extension of their gendered identity within the home. Invoking the image of the virtuous woman, who was the very embodiment of self-sacrifice, piety and morality, the Council defined a national mission for Canadian women premised upon these qualities. Specifically interested in attracting women from diverse religious faiths and political beliefs, the Council had to create a collective rallying point that could potentially unite these disparate women. Focusing on a mission of "mothering" allowed the Council to present a collective identity and virtuous image for Canadian women. Whether women were actually mothers was irrelevant since, as Aberdeen notes,

every woman is called upon to 'mother' in some way or another; and it is impossible to be in this country, even for a little while and not be impressed with a sense of what a great work of 'mothering' is in a special sense committed to the women of Canada (NCWC, 1894: 11).

By stressing this mission of “mothering,” the Council identified for Canadian women a collective identity that would enable, shape, and ultimately limit their participation in the public sphere. But it was through creating a discourse that invested motherhood with responsibilities and duties that transcended the domestic sphere that the National Council sought to provide a banner under which all women could unite and work toward the common good. As noted by Baker (1984) in her discussion of the “domestication of politics” in antebellum America, the social category of “woman” had the characteristics of a universal designation uniting all women working toward reform. She contends that “womanhood” and “motherhood” were “powerful integrating forces” that enabled collective action across class and racial lines (633). For women active in the National Council, “motherhood” and “womanhood” legitimated the participation of middle-class women in a sphere larger than the familial home. While these gendered categories were universally applicable to all women, it was the middle-class woman who emerged as the representative of “organized womanhood” and who specifically possessed the moral capacity to elevate and purify the public domain.

Thorpe (1972) notes in her analysis of the reform impulse of Lady Aberdeen that the purpose of the National Council was to give women “through the work of social reform, a chance to infuse a high tone into the society in which they moved” (iii). Positioned as “angels in the house” Canadian women were imbued with a moral authority in the raising and rearing of future generations. This private function of motherhood was invested with public significance as the

Council sought to legitimize women's public participation. Intimately connected to the spheres of moral regulation and character formation within the home, women's emergence into the public sphere was enabled through their creation of a realm that required their unique talents.

That women were to provide a strong, moral guide in Canadian public life finds its most explicit expression during the Council's formative years. At the first Annual Meeting of 1894, there was extensive discussion of women's moral responsibilities, and how these responsibilities must be brought to bear on public officials and offices. Indeed, if women were to have any public role at all, that role would be predicated upon their inherent moral sensibilities. Inevitably following from this assumption was the mission of the National Council: "the moral perfection of women in general" (NCWC, 1894: 69). This call upon women to be perfect had ramifications beyond the domestic realm. Indeed, women's moral perfection reflected the development and promise of the nation itself.

This work of educational and social reform is opening up to women in many ways – demanding of them qualities of head, and heart, and soul, whereby they may infuse a high tone in the society in which they move – a high ideal in the private discussion of public questions, a high ideal in all things whether pertaining to private or public life. It is on the women of any community that the promotion of such a high tone and ideal depends, and well it is for that country which has daughters who will rise to the level of their high opportunities, and who will endeavor to carry their ideal into every department of life (NCWC, 1894: 178).

Hence, the work of the National Council attempted to broaden the domain of the public sphere to include women's interests and contributions. In this sense, there is the attempt to create an understanding of public life as more expansive than the political sphere or political institutions. Public participation extends to involve

the creation and negotiation of public opinion, the interpersonal exchange of opinions, and the possibility of coming to an understanding of an issue through communication. But at the same time, this understanding of women's public participation constructs a feminized role for them. Within this conceptualization of women's contribution to public life, their exercise of moral influence within the home is constructed as the ultimate expression of their authority. Women's central contribution in this instance is the ability to infuse a "high tone" in the "private discussion of public questions." Presuming that the "private discussion" is one conducted with a husband or male relative, women's public opinion and influence does not find a direct channel to political power, but is instead mediated through a personal relationship to men.

While the Council carefully defined public life to enable women's active participation, it also constructed this participation as separate from the work carried out by Canadian men. Indeed, throughout Council discussions of various issues, men's and women's public responsibilities were reinforced as separate, yet necessary to the building of a strong nation.

The man and the woman must work side by side, the man with his calmer judgment and his closer knowledge of the world to moderate and guide, the woman in her passionate earnestness and her impelling hopefulness to uplift and to sustain (NCWC, 1905: 139).

In these attempts to facilitate women's public participation, Council members attempted to create a collective identity for Canadian women through the discussion of the role and importance of motherhood. While acknowledging that not all women were mothers, they maintained that all women shared a maternal

responsibility toward themselves, each other, and toward the nation as a whole. The construction of the mothering mission was an attempt to find an appropriate and acceptable channel for women's influence. While Council members encouraged women to unite for the common good, they also constructed the limits around women's participation. Stressing their commitment to home and family, constructing a position of private moral influence, Council offered a feminized political position for Canadian women.

### **Women's Clubs and Self-Development**

Women's emergence into the public sphere was predicated upon the creation of arenas in public life that were receptive to their participation. This expansion of their "proper domain" necessarily entailed the development of organizations that facilitated their education, sociability, and self-development. Indeed, if women were to be able to infuse a high tone into the private discussion of public questions, they must be informed on relevant social issues and be able to offer well-articulated opinions. As early as the first Annual Meeting of the National Council, members were asserting the necessity of women's clubs and associations in preparing them for their entry into public life. Tacitly acknowledging women's increasing public prominence, a Council member from Montreal, Josephine Dandurand, asserted that women's clubs contributed to women's education and public awareness, and ultimately worked toward their "perfection." Indeed, she asked, if women were to be perfect,

Then what shall we style perfection? Shall it be the condition of the blindly devoted wife and mother, a good Christian at heart and filled with excellent intentions, but incapable of understanding, and

much less of inspiring the thoughts of her husband, unable to cultivate the intellectual faculties of her children, of inculcating in them the notion, the 'spirit' of good (NCWC, 1894: 70).

Thus, the woman's club encouraged women to take a broader interest in social and political affairs, to become engaged and informed on issues of interest, and, perhaps most importantly, to develop the ability and courage to express their opinions. It was through the tutelage of such clubs that women would be able to capitalize on their increasing social prominence and significance. The woman's club was the medium through which women could be organized into engaged and articulate citizens. In becoming informed about public affairs, and being able to express their opinions, women

might have a chance of throwing off that livery of commonplace nothingness and insignificance which, like the tunic of Nessus, obstinately clings to us, characterizes our speech, our amusements, our customs, and all our actions and doings (NCWC, 1894: 70).

Tacitly acknowledging the extent to which women's consignment to the domestic sphere served to devalue their public participation, Dandurand asserted that through participation in clubs and voluntary associations, women would find a degree of public authority and legitimacy.

That the Council aimed to provide such an opportunity for Canadian women was stressed by Aberdeen in her inaugural address in 1894. Clearly acknowledging the Council's exclusion of the male sex, she stated:

Some seem inclined to regret that this organization was not formed on lines which would have included all workers without respect to sex; but I think we feel that we can probably do best, at least for a time, by keeping by ourselves, and that we need to go through an apprenticeship. Perhaps if we show what we can do,

and how we can be successful on these lines, others may follow (NCWC, 1894: 10-11).

Indeed, the Council was aware of its exemplary status as a national federation of women's associations, and saw itself as part and parcel of women's inauguration into public life. It is perhaps unsurprising that this participation was structured around women's position within the home. But what was significant about these discussions was that it was women's place within the home that demanded they take a larger stock of the world around them and find appropriate and useful avenues of participation. For Aberdeen and other Council members, women's public sensibility was not an indication of their challenge to the existing social order, but their acceptance of their role within it.

If she is to be truly her husband's companion, her children's friend and guide, the maker of a home that will shed light and blessing, not only on its own inmates, but on the strangers who pass from time to time within her gates, she must needs understand the changes that are taking place in social conditions, the progress of thought in all directions (NCWC, 1894: 12).

Through this understanding of the necessity of women's education in matters of national and political concern, the National Council created a form of transcendent citizenship for Canadian women. Predicated upon their position within the home, and their responsibilities to husband, children, and family, women's identities as citizens were constructed as emblematic of self-sacrifice, nurturance and care for others. Offering a gendered interpretation of women's citizenship, Council discourses defined such citizenship through images of light, goodness, and blessing. Despite the arguments that stressed the necessity of women's participation in spheres outside the home, Council members

conceptualized women's "influence" as a form of "inspiration" to their children and husbands. Whereas the notion of "influence" carries with it a degree of authority and power, that an individual acts upon another in order to convince them of something, "inspiration" connotes a more intangible process. Indeed, to "inspire the thoughts" of their husbands is not necessarily to persuade, influence or convince them of the validity of women's opinions. Rather, according to dictionary definitions, to inspire is to "create a feeling in a person" or "to give rise to" a feeling, an opinion, an idea (Oxford Dictionary of Current English). Hence, women's influence is not rooted in the masterful command of logic or reason, but rather in the qualities of moral or divine inspiration. Hence, through these discourses, women were not seen as the bearers of individual rights, but the bearers of moral duties and responsibilities which demanded that they have a larger and more influential role in the affairs of the nation. Through Council's discussion of its mission and role in Canadian society, there was the attempt to circulate an alternative understanding of women's roles in public and private life. Women should be involved in decisions that affect the family not because they are disinterested individuals, but because they are so thoroughly interested and engaged in these concerns.

### **Civil Society, Publics and the National Council**

The attempt to theorize the relationship between different "publics" in civil society is a concern of contemporary political theorists McLaughlin (1993), Fraser (1992) and Emirbayer and Sheller (1999). These theorists suggest differing concepts of

the public sphere and civil society, but each propose that civil society is best understood as the domain where discursive publics interact and challenge dominant understandings of public issues. Central to these analyses is the idea that social movements such as feminism have a dual purpose: they seek to create collective identity and solidarity among its members, and they seek to alter, influence and democratize structures of political and economic power.

While these critics are concerned to interrogate the possibilities of critical theory for contemporary feminism, I want to suggest that such an understanding of various and competing discursive publics provides a useful theoretical frame for analyzing the discursive and communicative actions of the NCWC. So far, this chapter has discussed the “internal” orientation of the National Council of Women. The Council’s internal focus was to encourage its members to identify with the politics of mothering, to create a self-understanding as a purifying influence on Canadian public life, and to create a gendered identity as political actors. The National Council constructed a form of transcendent citizenship for Canadian women through discourses that stressed women’s maternal responsibilities and private duties, and that constructed women’s roles as ancillary to and supportive of men. Through participation in women’s clubs and organizations such as the Council, women worked toward their own “moral perfection.” Indeed, it was this perception of moral superiority that was deemed necessary for women’s entry into public life. But through this understanding of women’s moral superiority, through their activism on issues of moral and social reform, they performed and embodied a notion of citizenship that was not rooted

in universal notions of human rights, justice and equality. Rather, women's identity as citizen transcended these "liberal" notions of individual rights and was instead grounded in moral notions of their "responsibilities and duties." Women were not welcomed into the public sphere on a basis equal to men. Instead, they entered the public sphere through an elevated plane, through discourses that stressed their self-sacrifice, their commitment to traditional values, and their responsibilities to future generations.

In addition to the Council's self-understanding as "mothers of the nation," they created a public self-image as "a splendid army of organized womanhood." The "dual process" of the National Council was, on the one hand, to gather together the nation's women, to create a collective understanding of their roles and responsibilities as wives and as mothers. This process necessitated a discursive construction of citizenship that emanated from their privatized identities and from their "natural" responsibility for the care and rearing of future generations. But, on the other hand, participation in Council was predicated upon the belief that women should form themselves into an articulate public, and that society as a whole needed the participation of women in these affairs (Griffiths, 1993).

As discussed in chapter one, women's public activism at the turn of the twentieth century was rooted in their participation in a variety of social and moral reform projects. Initially introduced to the work of "social uplifting" through charity and church work, women began to form associations separate from specific churches, although still motivated by religious belief. Organizations such as the

Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Association, and the Young Woman's Christian Association, all signaled the secularization of women's moral reform efforts. But they additionally suggest the extent to which these organizations functioned as discursive publics through which women could participate in the creation and generation of public opinion.

The formation of the National Council of Women of Canada in 1893 reflected an optimism regarding women's potential influence upon the national and international stage. Addressing the Council delegates at its first Annual Meeting in Ottawa in 1894, Mary Macdonell, one of the founders of the Council, gave voice to the unifying potential of "organized womanhood":

The old century is on the wane. Through the shadow of the globe we shall usher into the new century a splendid army of organized womanhood, and in that glorious dawn we catch the vision of a brighter day. When the interests here represented shall be wrought out into living truths, it will bring humanity into more harmonious relations by infusing justice into citizenship, purity into social relations, and the spirit of the Golden Rule into all life (NCWC, 1894: 17).

Arguing that "the world needs the great mother heart of humanity" (NCWC, 1894: 17), Macdonell invests the emergence of women into public life with religious, national, and international significance. The emergence of women as a unified and engaged "public" in society was an important precursor to their formal recognition as feminized citizens. In order to be acknowledged as the "nation-builders" they purported to be, women had to demonstrate that they represented more than their own individual interests. Attempting to secure for Canadian women a role in influencing public policy, the Council presented itself as representative of organized womanhood. Central to this process was the attempt

to create a public image of the organization as a moderate, engaged, and rational public. This chapter now turns to a consideration of the “external” functions of the National Council as a public representative of “organized womanhood” and women’s public opinion.

### **Defining “Organized Womanhood”**

An early perception of the National Council as a “women’s rights” organization caused its membership considerable concern, and some members took the opportunity to establish Council’s moderation and conservatism. The inaugural address of Lady Aberdeen drew a clear distinction between the work and aims of the National Council and the aims of the “new” woman.

We are not seeking to agitate for rights – we do not wish for opportunities of glorifying our own sex at the expense of the other – we are not desirous of pushing ourselves to the front at all times and seasons; but there is one right which we do claim and seek to obtain and that is the right of understanding more about our duty and how we may best do it. ‘Women’s duties’ and not Woman’s Rights, that is to be our cry (NCWC, 1894: 177).

Thus, from the outset, the National Council presented itself as a moderate organization, formed with the express purpose of educating themselves, and other women, about their duties and responsibilities. That the public sphere was opening up to women in a way unknown before necessitated the creation of a public role that complemented their “natural” mission as mothers and caretakers. For the women active in the National Council, women’s entry into the public was not necessarily an abandonment of their commitment to the private domain. Indeed, in the words of Lady Margaret Taylor, Council president from 1899-1902

and 1910-1911, women's widening social sphere merely meant the widening of their mission. Against the perception of the "new woman" who symbolized the potential destruction of the home and family, emerged the "Council woman", who was "eminently conservative" and who did not believe "that their duty towards humanity can be enclosed in the four walls of the home. If the home is to be protected from evil, women must make the surroundings of that home their care in ever widening measure" (NCWC, 1901: 31).

The fear that they would be perceived as strident, vocal or unwomanly was a central concern for members and affected how they described their mission and their role in Canadian society. While fully defending a woman's right to learn more about her duties and responsibilities, Council members distanced themselves from the women they felt were too strident or too political. For women active in the Council, sisterhood had boundaries.

We repudiate utterly those types of the strong-minded women so called, who have brought the name into ridicule and contempt. We claim no kinship with her who meanly deprecates and slanders her own sex, nor with the woman who, ostensibly with a moral purpose, indulges in exaggerated tirades against man, attacks which are often unjust, sometimes in very bad taste, and nearly always prejudicial to the cause they are supposed to serve (NCWC, 1894: 220).

Perhaps because it sought to influence (or "inspire") public policy and inform male leaders about potential paths of reform, Council was careful to stress that its vision of woman's sphere was in no way an attempt to usurp man's domain. But in addition to this careful delineation between men's and women's public responsibilities, Council members were specifically engaged in creating an understanding of public-spirited women who could make a positive contribution to

Canadian society without sacrificing their womanliness. In fact, the quality of “womanliness” specifically prepared women for their public role.

We are profoundly thankful that from the outset the leaders of our Councils have been, wise, experienced, womanly women, who are deeply impressed with the belief that the chief power of women lies in their womanliness, and that the essence of womanliness is a spirit of self-sacrifice, learnt by long ages of discipline in the home, and which has prepared her to some degree to undertake the wider work to which a Divine Voice now seems to be calling her, in the same spirit – for by that spirit only we can conquer (NCWC, 1895: 142).

The attempt to make women’s public participation palatable and acceptable to a widespread and largely critical public characterized Council’s discussions of the differences between themselves and “new” women. Discussing women’s general apprehension about the Council and what membership in it might entail, Harriet Boomer, Council representative from London, Ontario, asked:

Should we become ‘emancipated?’ (whatever that might mean); would that curious conglomeration, ‘the new woman’, be evolved amongst us? should we hustle one another to the polls, and cry aloud for women’s rights, with a good many other, ‘should we’s?’ which all met their speedy negative, almost with the first word which fell from your lips. With the fundamental principle laid down that all woman’s work for woman, however far-reaching it might become, and however glorious its goal, *must begin* at home (NCWC, 1895: 263, original emphasis).

It was woman’s commitment to her domestic responsibilities, to the care and protection of her children that necessitated her emergence into public life. But again, Council members continually stressed that their chief priority was to ensure that women’s public participation would develop along specific routes. Tacitly acknowledging the distinction between the sexes, Council members

admitted that women brought the concerns of home and family to the public domain, but they further asserted that the male perspective was hobbled without the thoughtful and committed participation of women. Asserting that “the masculine or feminine judgment by itself is necessarily *‘partial,’* and inadequate to the problems of a complex world” (NCWC, 1905: 135, original emphasis), Council members continually stressed the necessity of women’s public participation.

### **The Public Role of Virtuous Womanhood**

In attempting to furnish Canadian women with a unified public voice, Council members created an understanding of women’s “public-spiritedness” that would not undermine or compromise their femininity. Carefully defined and constructed as men’s helpmates, women who participated in public life were an embodiment of virtuous womanhood. Assuaging fears that the NCWC worked toward women’s political emancipation, Aberdeen instead suggested that the organization sought to solidify the gendered divide between men’s and women’s domains.

And do you think that the influence of our organization is likely to produce unwomanly women, who will aggressively assert and claim rights in a spirit of arrogant superiority, and who will at all seasons seek to attack and lord it over the men, for whom God created them to be help-mates – help-mates to help men be worthy of themselves? (NCWC, 1895: 141).

In this vision, Council is presented as an ancillary and supporting institution that, through influence and moral suasion, attempted to elevate the tone of public life and encourage male leaders to reach a higher moral standard. Note here that it

is through women's moral guidance and public participation that men are encouraged to "be worthy of themselves."

In her discussion of women in public, Ryan (1992) provides a brief history of women's representation in public domains. Arguing that women had an honoured place as "ceremonial representations of the public," she contends that such symbolic representations had implications for women's actual participation in public actions. "As a symbol or goddess, as a consort of the elite, on ceremonial days, or as a sexual pariah in public houses, women bore the mark of either ornament or outcast in public life" (266). I want to suggest that this symbolic understanding of "public women" also influenced the Council's self-presentation. Women's symbolic representations as justice, liberty and morality shaped their participation in public life, as they attempted to embody these symbolic representations. Hence, it was only through invoking these transcendent qualities that women were able to gain a rhetorical and discursive purchase on public space.

Through its focus on women's moral authority, their virtue, and "womanliness," the National Council provided a feminine alternative to the masculine public realm. In her discussion of the Council's contribution to Canadian public life, Griffiths (1993) asserts that the organization was a "clear and effective alternative to the established institutions of Canadian life, at that time pre-eminently the domain of Canadian men, for women who wished to have a public voice" (207). This description of the Council as a "clear and effective alternative," a description shared by the Council itself, invokes the image of a

parallel structure for women's public activism. Formally denied the right to vote, and formally excluded from holding public office, women had limited spheres for political or public engagement. Council, premised on the ideology of the separation of spheres, contributed to and institutionalized women's separate status by linking their public role to their maternal responsibilities. While Council provided women with an opportunity for a public life, their public participation was in the form of influence and moral suasion, not of overt and direct political power.

But Council did provide an opportunity for women to affect Canadian life, despite the fact that women's influence was "wielded in a more restricted area" (Griffiths, 1993: 109). As an organization that sought to unify the efforts of Canadian women active in a variety of reform issues, Council was an informed and influential public within an emergent Canadian civil culture. Formally divorced from overt political power, not wedded to any one political, social, or moral reform, Council was an engaged and potentially influential public. Not only was it a vehicle through which women were able to participate in public life, it was also the means by which previously "private" issues were brought into public discourse.

### **The National Council, Representation and Moderation**

Council's claim to represent the diverse interests of women was predicated upon the belief that, once they were unified and organized, Canadian women would make an invaluable contribution to the nation. Women's participation in the Council testified to their commitment to securing a strong, vibrant, and moral

nation. As a "national" council, the NCWC sought to "provide a common platform and means of co-operation for all who are working for the promotion of its aim and purpose" (NCWC, 1894: iv). This commitment to the provision of a common platform for Canadian women necessarily entailed a degree of compromise with respect to controversial issues such as woman suffrage or labour disputes. Roberts (1979), Bacchi (1979; 1983) and Strong-Boag (1976) have argued that Council's moderation undercut the potential of the first wave women's movement and served to secure the hegemony of the middle classes in Canadian society. Its reluctance to endorse woman suffrage and its refusal to support striking female workers at Eaton's (Frager, 1992) were testament to its fundamental conservatism. Indeed, Council itself acknowledged this conservatism through its promise to support "no one propaganda". But to criticize the organization for its moderation is to neglect consideration of an important element of the Council's role in Canadian society. It sought to be a representative voice for the women with an active interest in issues of social reform. That the Council did not subscribe to specific political or religious beliefs was indicative of its mission to create an organized and informed representative public of Canadian women.

The structure of the Council reflected this commitment as well. At the Annual Meeting of 1898, Aberdeen stressed the heavy responsibility that rested with the women of Council in representing "the thought, desires and aspirations of hundreds and thousands of other workers" (NCWC, 1898: 37). Indeed, such a commitment necessarily meant that Council delegates had to abstract themselves from their own personal views on given topics in order to faithfully

represent the wishes of their Local constituents. "We are bound in honour to represent the *real* spirit, the *real* feelings, and the *real* work of those who send us, as well as just vote according to our instruction" (NCWC, 1898: 37). So, for Council members, participation in Local and the National Council provided an opportunity to gauge the interests, needs, and opinions of women throughout the nation. Certainly, delegates at the Annual Meeting of the National Council purported to represent the interests of their members, but the composition of the Local Councils and national societies did not necessarily reflect or represent the interests of all Canadian women. Local Councils were largely concentrated in urban centres and the National Council's head offices were located in Ottawa. These geographic factors suggest the extent to which Council was perhaps best able to represent the interests of an urban middle-class. As noted by Strong-Boag (1976), Council's urban composition was reflected in the lack of representation of rural or working-class women within its ranks. As the following chapters in this dissertation will make clear, it was Council's middle-class and urban membership that enabled its self-presentation as the representative voice of Canadian women.

### **Representation and Religious Differences: The Debate Over Silent Prayer**

While Council members articulated a vision of united womanhood, the organization was presented with issues that challenged its claim to act as the unified voice of Canadian women. More so than political differences, differences in religious belief potentially provided a stumbling block for the organization.

Conscious of bitter and divisive religious politics, the NCWC attempted to negotiate these differences. Desirous of attracting as many women as possible, and concerned to not alienate Catholic women specifically, the Council instituted the practice of silent prayer at its Annual Meetings. The decision to institute silent prayer caused a crisis within the Council membership. In 1895, Council members from London, Ontario presented a resolution asking for the audible recitation of the Lord's Prayer. Concerned that the failure to incorporate audible prayer into its meetings would cost the National Council the participation of women from the YWCA and WCTU, the London Council proposed the resolution as an acceptable compromise. In presenting the resolution, Harriet Boomer acknowledged the potential public ramifications of a refusal to recite the Lord's Prayer.

Societies are abiding the issue to decide whether they shall join us or not; others already in federation are holding back their annual fees whilst it is in abeyance, and on every hand people are watching to see if the representative women of Canada are really going to vote against the united use of the Lord's Prayer at their public meetings. May Heaven forbid it! (NCWC, 1895: 187).

The perception that Council was an irreligious organization was a central concern for some members, who believed that it could ill-afford any suggestion of impropriety, stridency, or secularity. Indeed, for the London Local Council, the audible declaration of religious faith was testament to the Council's commitment to righteous causes. Central to the claim to represent all Canadian women was the assumption that women's public work must be acknowledged as divinely inspired. Perhaps illustrating the difficulties involved in conceptualizing women as "political" public actors, Council members expressed the belief that

acknowledging religious faith was essential in providing a degree of moral authority and legitimacy to their public work.

But for some Council members, the unified use of the Lord's Prayer was criticized as an attempt to impose a unity that, in reality, did not exist. Julia Drummond from the Montreal Local Council acknowledged the potential division caused by religious differences. In supporting the use of silent prayer only, she clearly positioned the National Council as an organization neither limited nor constrained by religious belief.

*Unity of Creed is not ours. Let us not pretend to it, let there be no covering over of differences, no assumption that these differences are unimportant; but let us realize that we are met together, not to make a common profession of faith, not to aim at a seeming harmony by repressing as individuals our individual belief, but to work together in the service of God and of Humanity (NCWC, 1895: 193, original emphasis).*

Hence, Council's mission was not to bring together women already united through their chosen religious faith, but to provide a meeting ground between women potentially divided by religious belief. Indeed, for the members from Montreal, what was significant about the National Council was that it represented a wide-scale reform movement that attempted to transcend individual religious beliefs.

However, the debate over silent prayer indicated that the Council's position as the voice of unified women was tenuous. In fact, the decision to retain silent prayer resulted in the refusal of the YWCA and the WCTU to federate with the Council at the national level. In fact, as noted by Cook (1995), the WCTU did not federate with the National Council until 1919 (68), and the YWCA delayed its

membership until 1914 (69). Members of each of these organizations were active in Local Councils, but this was largely due to the fact that some Councils, such as the Local Council in London, decided to institute audible prayer (Mitchinson, 1987). The debate on silent prayer was significant because it illustrated that the Council was not, in fact, able to represent the thoughts, desires, and interests of all Canadian women active in social or moral reform. The fact that the two largest reform organizations delayed their participation in the National Council over this issue is a significant indication of the fallacy of "united womanhood." However, the decision to retain silent prayer only was also a significant commitment by Council members to create a representative organization. The Council's provision of a non-denominational alternative to women's church-based reform work was an attempt to broaden women's sphere to include the public domain. As such, it was also an attempt to circulate an acceptance and understanding of women as public citizens.

### **The National Council and Women's Public Opinion**

The attempt to be representative and to unite women active in moral and social reform efforts was indicative of the attempt to secure for women an acceptable and appropriate public domain. Throughout discussions on the Council's mission and role in Canadian society, its members stressed the organization's moderation, wisdom, and the support it received from male political leaders. Through its commitment to a variety of reform issues, its refusal to pledge allegiance to one political or religious philosophy, and its attempts to influence

public opinion, Council presented itself as a parallel public domain for the nation's women. Council was concerned to be the organization that brought women together, focused their reform strategies, and channeled their influence toward the men who held direct political power.

If, therefore, our public men, whether in the Dominion Parliament or Provincial Legislature, or on municipal or other boards, have to make enquiries and take up a policy which effects [*sic*] women and children, will they remember that there is an organized body of voluntary women workers who are ready to give their loyal and ready help to any object which will help forward the common good, and from whom the opinion of women of the country, not of one section only, but of all, can be ascertained? (NCWC, 1896: 368).

Describing itself as representing women's public opinion on matters affecting women and children, the Council attempted to position itself as an engaged and articulate public in Canadian society. Through their membership in the National and Local Councils, Canadian women attempted to organize themselves into a public body, educated on issues of general concern, ready and able to inform social policies affecting Canadian families. It was under the aegis of the National Council that Canadian women became familiar with political organizations and processes, and through the Council, women created an acceptable understanding of the public-spirited woman.

Council provided women with the opportunity to become informed and educated about public issues and to prepare themselves to assume a more prominent public role. Indeed, for members of the Council, its Annual Meetings, Reports and Yearbooks were a testament to the development and progress of

Canadian womanhood. Discussing the value of the Yearbooks, Henrietta Muir

Edwards commented:

We look upon our Verbatim Report as the biography or the history of the growth of women's opinion in Canada, and I think if we take our first report and then the reports of succeeding years, we shall be very much pleased to see the mental growth – perhaps not the mental growth, – but growth of the ability to express the thoughts of the women of Canada (NCWC, 1899/1900: 178).

Through participation in the Council, Canadian women expanded their personal private domains and were potentially influenced by women of different religious or political beliefs. Through the provision of a medium through which women could create, inform, and shape public opinion, Council was able to present itself as an important voice in the Canadian political landscape. The very heart of the Council's mandate was to provide an informed, engaged and articulate vehicle through which "women" could be organized into a "public."

But at the same time, the Council also defined women's public participation as separate from the exercise of direct political power. Focusing on how women could "infuse a high tone" in society, shape the moral character of future leaders, and encourage present leaders to reach a higher standard, women's political "power" operated at the level of personal and collective influence. As the representation of "women's public opinion," Council positioned itself as ancillary to the "strong" political publics populated by men. Indeed, the highest form of political intervention advocated by Council was its potential ability to inform public policy – a role that necessarily depended upon the interest and engagement of public men.

This commitment to an indirect exercise of power through influence was a key to Council's success, according to an observer who stated: "As a rule its part is rather to initiate movements than to carry them out, to influence and suggest rather than to engage in large enterprise" (NCWC, 1905: 138). The Council's position as bearer of women's public opinion enabled it to win audiences with political leaders and representatives. Indeed, the NCWC would have met with little success

without the active sympathy and co-operation of men. That it has been able to secure these, is, we think, a tribute to the judgment of the Council, an evidence that it has not acted on mere impulse or superficial knowledge, but has formed conclusions only after careful thought and inquiry (NCWC, 1905: 138).

The slow, moderate and deliberate approach taken by Council members would ensure that their concerns and petitions would, at the very least, receive a sensitive hearing by those in power.

When we offer a petition, which we honestly believe to be for the public weal, we are accorded a patient and willing hearing, and our request is seldom refused, if it be possible to grant it. We have won this courtesy by trying never to presume upon it, by having, through committees and individuals, obtained every bit of necessary information upon the subject before we presented it, to the powers that be (NCWC, 1905: 141).

As Griffiths (1993) notes, throughout the Council's history, it functioned as "a study group, as a clearing house, and as a market-place for information" (93) with the intent of creating a public space for women to participate alongside men as their help-mates and colleagues. That Council provided an effective and efficient introduction to public life for women was illustrated through its own development and through the increasing support of men:

We rejoice to know that each year has brought with it fresh fields to labour in, new opportunities for usefulness, a wider outlook, a greater tenacity of purpose, an increasing unanimity of aim and enlightenment of methods, and, perhaps even better still, the more and more frequent and appreciative co-operation of men who, having long ceased to criticize us, have joined in our work as 'colleagues' (NCWC, 1911: 87-88).

The highest acknowledgment of the legitimacy of women's public opinion was that men had begun to support their efforts. In this discussion, Council traced its transition from an organization that sought to unify women's social and moral reform efforts to one that enjoyed the willing support of men. Through the attempt to create a collective identity and understanding of women's role in public life, and bring women together for effective action on social reform, the Council sought to legitimize a public role for women that complemented their privatized identities. Council members additionally attempted to ensure that women's public opinion could find an audience with male political leaders. In this sense, the Council attempted to expand the public domain in order to facilitate women's participation.

This chapter has offered an analysis of the National Council as a discursive public in Canadian society. Centrally motivated by the attempt to secure for Canadian women an acceptable and appropriate public role, Council members sought to make "mothering" a national mission. Following the arguments of Felski (1989) and Fraser (1992), this chapter discussed the dual function of the National Council. Internally, the Council attempted to provide a space to bind women together, to create a collective public identity and to generate consensus on issues of concern. Externally, the Council sought to

represent the public opinion of the nation's women and to win an audience for these opinions with men who held direct political power.

The dissertation now shifts its focus to consider the processes by which Council members addressed the specific issues of woman suffrage, domestic science and women's education, and the problem of "pernicious" literature. Through an analysis of the specific discourses produced about these issues, we can begin to understand how the Council as an organization sought to facilitate women's participation in domains beyond the home. The following chapters discuss the process by which women's responsibilities as mothers, their responsibilities to rear the nation's future leaders, were central structures that determined the type of role women were expected to play in the public domain.

**Chapter Four**  
**Transcendent Citizenship**  
**Suffrage and the Politics of Organized Womanhood**

---

As out of the darkness of old, the Star of Bethlehem came to guide the men of the East, so in Ontario, as well as in the Western Provinces, there has arisen a new and brilliant constellation – the Star of Womanhood (Augusta Stowe-Gullen, NCWC, 1917: 85).

Responding to the granting of the Provincial franchise to women in the West and in Ontario, and the imminent extension of the Federal franchise to Canadian women, Augusta Stowe-Gullen invoked an image of woman as leading the nation to prosperity and greatness. Creating the image of woman as a star in the firmament, Stowe-Gullen was not merely being hyperbolic; she was drawing on a rhetorical understanding of woman's political and social functions that characterized the discussions of woman suffrage in the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC). Rhetorically linking women's public activism to a religious mission, stressing women's moral and social reform work, and constructing women as virtuous, Council discourses on woman suffrage articulated a vision of transcendent citizenship for Canadian women. Drawing on discourses that linked womanliness and Godliness, stressed women's link to "the Infinite," and constructed women as virtuous, Council discourses on woman suffrage represented a significant moment in the construction and understanding of women's role in Canadian society. Indeed, for Council members, women's citizenship was rooted in moral and social reform, exercised through moral influence and suasion, and predicated upon their presumed moral superiority. The question of women's formal enfranchisement under the law presented

Council members with an opportunity to circulate an understanding of women as moral citizens.

This chapter discusses the multiple, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory discourses on woman suffrage within the NCWC. These discourses successfully constructed woman suffrage as an indication of the status and progress of the Canadian nation, as an example of women's virtue and purity, as a reasonable and moderate issue, and as a patriotic measure. Through a variety of discussions, reports, speeches and conferences, Council members created a discourse about woman suffrage that focused on women's responsibilities to themselves, their families, and the Canadian nation. In formulating its position on woman suffrage, the NCWC created a discursive field that both enabled and constrained women's participation in Canadian public life. These discourses were fundamentally concerned with the gender identity, the social roles, and the political duties and responsibilities of Canadian women.

Liesbet van Zoonen (1995) has argued that gender should be conceptualized as "a particular discourse ... a set of overlapping and often contradictory cultural descriptions and prescriptions referring to sexual difference, which arises from and regulates particular economic, social, political, technological and other non-discursive contexts" (33). This chapter also demonstrates how discussion of woman suffrage created a range of discursive possibilities and identifications of Canadian womanhood. In this chapter, I analyze gender, or more precisely, gender identity, as a "generalized form of communication" that serves to limit the range of identifications (Cohen, 1995). Council discourses on woman suffrage articulate and secure a place for women

in Canadian public life, but additionally construct this role as an extension of their gendered and privatized identities as wives and mothers.

This chapter examines the articulation of various, diverse, and multiple perspectives on woman suffrage in Council meetings, and discusses how these discourses informed, and were informed by, the imperatives of nation-building and the construction of appropriate gender roles in Canadian society. This analysis of the multiple and overlapping perspectives on woman suffrage is accompanied by a critical perspective that seeks to explain the ascendancy of some discourses as the common sense interpretations of social issues. It is not the case that all discourses have equal weight and influence. Rather, discourses are differentiated according to their institutional, political, or social "reach," their access to resources, their ability to provide coherent interpretations of social issues, and their relationship to established patterns and forms of political and institutional power (Fraser, 1992; Emirbayer and Sheller, 1999). This chapter argues, following Cohen's (1995) analysis, that gender functions as a generalized form of communication designed to stop debate at the presupposed "natural" understanding of women as wives and mothers. But additionally, this analysis reveals that patriotism and nation-building also act as generalized forms of communication that construct and limit the debate on suffrage in various, competing, and sometimes complementary ways.

Feminist critics have consistently argued that discourses are usefully conceptualized as sites of ideological contestation and debate (Fraser, 1989; Ryan, 1992; Young, 1987; Dean, 1996). For feminist theorists, then, discourses do not exemplify the attempt to reach consensus on a particular issue, but rather

signify the ability of “dominant” discourses to construct the boundaries and limits of the range of possible interpretations and understandings of social issues. Consequently, this chapter analyzes the discourses on woman suffrage in the NCWC as overlapping perspectives that cannot be reduced to a single, unitary understanding of the significance of the issue. Suffrage discourses represent a range of perspectives on the roles of women in Canadian society, and are fundamentally concerned to secure a place for women in public life. But, at the same time, these discourses seek to construct the limits of women’s public participation through narratives that normalize their role in the home, mythologize and elevate their maternal identity, and create a transcendent definition of their political identity. Rhetorically linking womanliness with Godliness, Council discourses on suffrage argued that women’s influence would transcend traditional political allegiances, elevate the status of the Canadian nation, and purify public life.

Given the variety of perspectives articulated to explain and justify woman suffrage, attempting to determine the “dominant” interpretation of the issue is a challenging task. However, the following discussion demonstrates that, while the suffrage question provided an opportunity for some Council members to criticize the legacy of male rule, the issue was overwhelmingly constructed as a moderate, democratic, and patriotic measure. It is important to stress the extent to which various, and sometimes divergent, perspectives on the question of woman suffrage coexisted. As van Zoonen acknowledges: “dominant discourse is not monolithic and impervious, but produces its own opposition and is open to negotiation” (1995: 39). It is in this sense that discourses on woman suffrage can,

on the one hand, detail the history of woman's disfranchisement, and, on the other hand, stress her purifying influence on social, political and public life. Paying attention to these seeming contradictions illustrates the extent to which "discourse itself is a form of power, since both the process of discourse (the symbolic interactions) and the product of discourse (a particular set of meanings and narratives) limit the possibilities of interpretation and privilege certain meanings above others" (van Zoonen, 1995: 39). This discussion of suffrage discourse, then, demonstrates the process through which Council members configured suffrage as an expression of women's moral duty, their purity, and their elevating influence. This analysis draws attention to the role of gender identity and nationalism in constructing the dominant understandings and interpretations of the woman suffrage question.

### **The "Problem" of Woman Suffrage**

The question of woman suffrage was a potentially controversial and difficult issue for the National Council. First of all, suffrage was, in comparison to domestic science training, the domestic service question, immigration, and public health issues, a "minor" concern for Council women. While Council members were seemingly unanimous in their support for domestic science instruction in public schools or the campaign to suppress "pernicious" literature, they were divided on whether to support the extension of the franchise to Canadian women. While Council members may have agreed on the severity of the social issues facing the nation, many were not convinced that enfranchising Canadian women would help to resolve these problems. But, at the same time, suffragists such as Carrie

Derick defended the extension of the franchise on the grounds that it would help women in their moral and social reform efforts. It is this articulation of woman suffrage within the context of women's commitment to moral and social reform that impacted how the issue was constructed and understood by Council members.

The woman suffrage issue arose periodically in Council's Annual Meetings and Conferences, but with less regularity than the above-mentioned social issues. This periodicity may be reflective of the apparent radicalism of such a claim, and Council's concern to present itself as a moderate organization that subscribed to no one political philosophy. Indeed, it was the stated moderation of Council's approach that afforded the organization a degree of respect and public sympathy, which was potentially threatened if it suddenly appeared to support such a divisive political measure.

The Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Association (DWEA), which later became later the Canadian Suffrage Association (CSA), was one of the first organizations to affiliate with the National Council in 1893. Emily Howard Stowe, President of the DWEA and her daughter, Augusta Stowe-Gullen, President of the CSA, were each active and vocal members of the NCWC. Specifically, as the president of the CSA and NCWC member, Stowe-Gullen was the primary representative of the suffrage question in Council meetings. In this role, she was responsible for "presenting" the issue to Council, defining its importance, and tracing the "progress" of the movement. Granted, Stowe and Stowe-Gullen were not the only spokespersons for the suffrage movement, and certainly not the only advocates for suffrage within Council, but it is significant that theirs were the

names most closely associated with the issue in Council discussions. This is not to suggest that suffrage was merely the pet cause of two women. Rather, it suggests the centrality of the Council for investing the suffrage issue with a degree of respectability, as well as providing suffrage organizers with access to women from different regions, cities, and provinces.

This chapter focuses on the discussions on woman suffrage within the National Council. In focusing exclusively on the Council, other prominent suffrage organizations such as the DWEA and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) are given less attention. As stated above, members of the DWEA were active in the Council, and emerged as the spokespersons for the cause within Council meetings. But the lack of participation of the WCTU in National Council meetings and conventions deserves further comment. As discussed in chapter three, the National Council formally adopted a policy of silent prayer at its Annual Meetings in 1895. As a result of this decision, the WCTU initially refused to federate with the organization at the national level, although temperance supporters were active in local councils of women (Mitchinson, 1987; Wilson, 1998). The absence of temperance advocates within the National Council had an impact on the construction and understanding of the suffrage issue. Throughout Council discussions, suffrage was entirely divorced from the temperance movement, and Council members made no link between calls for women's enfranchisement and alcohol reform. Some Council members linked suffrage to other social reform issues related to temperance, such as social purity, but the temperance cause was an issue that was beyond the pale for Council members.

Black and Brandt (1993) suggest that one reason for this was the Council's structure and the class affiliation of its membership (100). Advocating temperance rather than prohibition, Council's moderation on the issue was not palatable for members of the WCTU, who blamed "the demon rum" for a plethora of social problems (97). Council's commitment to "no one propaganda" necessitated a moderate approach to potentially divisive issues such as temperance and suffrage. But additionally, for Black and Brandt, Council's elite executive and middle-class membership affected its stance on prohibition. They state, "In some cases, members' husbands were politicians and businessmen who were opposed to prohibition" (100). Dorland and Charland (2002) note that the temperance and social purity movements were "the motor of English Canada's suffrage movement" (207), and it is important to stress that while the Council was active on social reform and social purity, it expressly distanced itself from the question of temperance and prohibition.

This chapter argues that the suffrage question was a dialectical struggle between women's increasing visibility and strategies of containment. It demonstrates the process by which the suffrage question was articulated within nation-building discourses that linked women's progress to the development of the nation, cast suffrage as a democratic issue, defined organized womanhood as a stabilizing force, and created a public role for the nation's mothers. Council discourses on suffrage offered a critique of women's social standing and lack of political rights. At the same time, such discourses also sought to legitimize women's public participation and define their duties and responsibilities. Council discourses on woman suffrage enabled wider discussions of women's role as

citizen, which incorporated calls for political equality with women's moral and social reform interests. In defending their rights to political representation and increased participation, Council members constructed a definition of femininity that linked Canadian women to a divine and moral mission and focused on their presumed moral superiority, their purifying influence, and their primary role as defenders of the private sphere. In so doing, Council discourses sought to enlarge "woman's sphere" to include politics, but also constructed suffrage as a transcendent form of citizenship.

The suffrage issue emerged in Council against the backdrop of increasing public concern over the place of women in Canadian society, and the public perception of suffrage as a radical measure, threatening to upset social order and stability. The National Council tacitly acknowledged these fears and, through its discussions on suffrage, sought to reassure the Canadian public that women wanted only what was best for the nation.

### **The NCWC, Communication and Knowledge**

This dissertation is premised on the argument that the National Council of Women of Canada is an organization where actions are coordinated communicatively, where there is the attempt to secure a place for women in Canadian society, and contribute to the democratization of that society. This chapter specifically focuses on Council's discussion of the suffrage issue and how such discussions created a space for women in Canadian society, but additionally reaffirmed the home as their primary domain. Fundamentally concerned with the operation of power in discourse, this chapter illustrates how

suffrage was an issue that was contested on a number of ideological fronts: through women's presumed moral superiority, their roles as mothers of the nation's future leaders, and through their responsibility to provide a shining example for men.

As stated in previous chapters, the National Council of Women of Canada was a significant organization because it was a concerted attempt of certain (read: white, middle and upper class) women to form themselves into a representative public. While the NCWC devoted itself to the study of a variety of social and moral concerns, its engagement with the suffrage issue was significant because it represented the first time that the organization was faced with an overtly "political" issue. Concerned to provide a neutral meeting ground for all Canadian women, the NCWC was cautious about appearing too strident, too political, or too challenging to the established social and political order. Council's moderation, its attempted avoidance of religious and political differences, and its commitment to social and moral reform, had a significant effect upon its construction and understanding of woman suffrage.

But perhaps it was the National Council's stated mission of bringing together moderate and progressive women that made it such an important organization for the suffrage leaders. For Emily Stowe, Augusta Stowe-Gullen, and other suffrage proponents, the NCWC was an important indication of the collective interests of the nation's women. The central role of the NCWC in mobilizing and unifying the interests and efforts of Canadian women was reflected in the comments of Emily Stowe, as she described the mission of the Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Association. Reporting on the Association's

work, Stowe claimed that the suffrage resolutions would only command attention if they were supported by a strong, organized deputation of women. Discussing the fate of a Bill for Woman's Suffrage in the Ontario Legislature in 1890, she stated: "but as usual, the bill was shelved – the Premier courteously offering his sympathy with our movement, and promising to accede to our request, when women were unanimous in desiring their enfranchisement" (NCWC, 1894: 49). While acknowledging that "such justice has never been deferred, on like ground to any class of disfranchised men," she concluded that suffragists were hopeful that, through Council, they could "inaugurate a more active and concerted method of Provincial and Dominion work" (NCWC, 1894: 49).

Affiliated with the National Council from the day of its formation, the Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Association periodically introduced the suffrage question in Council meetings, although it was not until 1910 that Council officially endorsed the measure. As Roberts (1979) has noted, there were two previous resolutions on suffrage in Council meetings in 1906 and 1907, and both of these resolutions were "handily defeated" (22). While this fact certainly indicates that Council was divided on the issue of woman suffrage, we might legitimately ask about the reasons behind Council's official endorsement of the measure in 1910. How much could have changed in three years? Was this merely the result of the acceptability of woman suffrage? Were Council members worn down by suffrage proponents? Social historians such as Roberts (1979) and Bacchi (1983) both contend that it was only after suffrage had been cast in thoroughly conservative and non-revolutionary terms that it was able to enjoy the support of the majority of Canadian men and women. Bacchi (1983) asserts that

Council's official support of woman suffrage in 1910 added a degree of acceptability and legitimacy to the issue (31). But these perspectives suggest that once suffrage was endorsed by Council, it ceased to be a controversial topic, and that Council's support of suffrage reflected a consensus within the organization and in society at large. Casting suffrage as an ideological struggle between progressive and conservative forces, Bacchi and Roberts neglect consideration of the extent to which suffrage functioned as a discursive field where women's social and political duties were defined, constituted, and challenged. For these reasons, suffrage remained an ideologically loaded issue, even after the Council officially endorsed the measure. The Council routinely discussed the issue of woman suffrage, and through the years of discussion, debate and the creation of knowledge about the topic, the suffrage question was presented to Council members as a moral responsibility, as a natural right, and as an expression of woman's fitness to serve.

### **Conflict or Consensus? Council's Official Endorsement of Suffrage**

First and foremost, the primary discussion that greeted the introduction of the resolution on woman suffrage was whether the measure contravened the Constitution of the National Council. Members from the Local Council in Hamilton attempted to have the resolution defeated on the grounds that it violated the Constitution of the National Council of Women of Canada. Aiming to have the resolution declared unconstitutional, and therefore not subject to a vote, the Hamilton Local Council cast suffrage as a question of "propaganda." In its objection to the suffrage resolution, the Hamilton Council stated:

The National Council has shown sympathy with the work of the Canadian Women's Suffrage Association in allowing them affiliation in the National Council. In this resolution they seek to go beyond sympathy and make use of the Council for the furtherance of their own particular propaganda and to commit all other societies in the Council to their principles and opinions (NCWC, 1910: 97).

Hence, the primary issue that greeted the suffrage resolution was whether the measure compromised the constitutional integrity of the organization. Council's function as a representative public for Canadian women was potentially challenged and undermined by voicing support for an expressly political issue such as woman suffrage. These fears over losing its representative function, of appearing as a "political" organization, or as voicing the concerns of a minority, presented significant challenges for Council's mandate.

Despite the insistence of some members that the suffrage resolution was unconstitutional and should not be subject to discussion within Council, the organization defeated the constitutional challenge, and debate then turned to the question of suffrage itself. It was through these various debates that the organization constructed the issue in a specific light. Speaking in favour of suffrage, Dr. Margaret Gordon, a member of the Canadian Suffrage Association, argued that suffrage would assist women in their campaign for moral and social reform. The Yearbook summarizes her arguments:

the temperance workers feel that the franchise will assist them. In fact, women seem to be using their influence for the moral advancement of society, and there is no reason to believe that when women receive a direct voice in affairs they will change (NCWC, 1910: 100).

Suffrage was defended on the grounds that it was a reasonable and democratic measure that would benefit society at large, not just women. But additionally for

Gordon, suffrage was also an important indicator of women's social status. That she was not enfranchised placed her in a lowly social position, keeping company with other disfranchised persons: "the criminal, the idiots, and the minors of the race" (NCWC, 1910: 100). Woman's recognition as citizen, then, was also an indication of her rising social prominence and import.

However, at the same time, there was the concern that women were not ready for such a measure, and that suffrage would not necessarily strengthen women's moral and social reform efforts. Lady Taylor, who supported the initial resolution proposed by the Hamilton Local Council, worried that woman suffrage would lead to increased corruption in politics: "Manhood suffrage, in the West at least, had been more or less disastrous, since their votes can be bought. So, too, would those of the women" (NCWC, 1910: 100). It was with respect to this fear over potential corruption that some Council members argued that women's commitment to moral and social reform should take precedence over calls for suffrage. One Council member, who identified herself as a suffragist, nevertheless argued against Council's endorsement of the measure. She argued that "our other work is too important, and our organization is not strong enough to risk losing the sympathy and approval of even small affiliated societies, by bringing the suffrage question to an issue here" (NCWC, 1910: 101).

But it was the importance of this "other work" that demanded women have the suffrage, according to Carrie Derick. She contended

it is a waste of energy to go from legislator to legislator to press our reforms; moreover, not having the authority carried by the power of the vote, we are frequently deserted by the very men who are supposed to represent our cause (NCWC, 1910: 103).

By acquiring the right to vote, women would be able to represent their own interests, and would no longer have to rely on men to represent them.

This perspective was echoed in the comments of Council members who argued that democracy needed the intervention of women and men in resolving difficult issues. "No perfect democracy and no complete solving of the problems of humanity can be hoped for without the representation of the feminine point of view" (NCWC, 1910: 104). Casting the suffrage issue as providing women with an opportunity to serve humanity, Council members stressed that suffrage was not a "selfish" issue. As Derick put it, "We do not ask this voting privilege for selfish ends, but through the desire to serve our fellow-men. It is our duty. The spirit of the age is for democracy. One sex cannot be excluded" (NCWC, 1910: 101).

Within these debates, then, the concerns and fears over the effects of woman suffrage were addressed. The resulting discourse established woman suffrage as constitutive of democracy, as a reflection of women's equality and rights, and as beneficial to society as a whole. It was within this discussion of the social functions of woman suffrage that Council voted, in 1910, to endorse the measure, with a vote of 71 to 51. However, this marginal endorsement of suffrage suggests that this "dominant" interpretation of the issue was subject to a degree of contestation and debate. Indeed, the Council record notes that "Lady Taylor entered a protest against this small majority vote being interpreted as a correct expression of the general feeling of the National Council" (NCWC, 1910: 104). So, while not all members agreed with the decision to endorse woman suffrage, the majority of members did express sympathy with a definition of

suffrage that defined it as a moral duty, stressed its democratic potential, and linked suffrage to women's other reform activities.

We can see in this debate not only concern over women's position in Canadian society, but an additional concern with the legitimacy and respectability of Council as a representative voice of Canadian women. A central objection to the introduction of suffrage as an issue was the perception that it would cast Council as a political organization, specifically interested in advancing women's political rights. Such a move, it was feared, risked losing the participation of moderate or conservative women within Council, but also risked losing public sympathy and support for the organization. The Council's response to the issue of woman suffrage was shaped not only by the prevailing social concerns regarding the role of women in Canadian society, but also by the administrative and institutional structure of the Council itself. Its focus on providing a meeting ground for progressive and conservative women, on expressing the general interests of Canadian women, and on maintaining the sympathy and support of prominent men necessitated a measured, rational, and moderate approach to potentially divisive and controversial issues.

But in considering the range and breadth of debate on the suffrage question, it becomes clear that the issue indexed a number of concerns relating to women's position in society, their moral responsibilities, their domestic duties, and their identity as citizen. This chapter will now consider the variety of issues raised in Council with respect to woman suffrage, and how these debates afforded women an opportunity to offer a criticism of modern society, to

thematize and elaborate on women's contribution to society, and to create a role for mothers in Canadian public life.

### **Suffrage and the Critique of Modern Society**

In her 1894 address to the National Council on the Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Association, Emily Stowe offered a sweeping analysis and critique of modern society and the unjust position of women therein. Serving as an "introduction" to the issue for Council women, the speech was significant for its framing of women's diminished social position, and its focus upon suffrage as the key to their emancipation. This analysis begins with Stowe's speech because she addressed a number of overlapping, and sometimes contradictory, discourses that shaped the debate on woman suffrage. Addressing the women of Council, she asserted the natural equality between men and women, and suggested that modern society was responsible for women's subordinate position:

I come now to speak of a Truth which is as old as the human race, but was lost to sight in the tangled wood of error, which culminated in a barbarous and inglorious past. The perfect equality between man and woman – the two factors, in the building of that most transcendent of all structures – the human family (NCWC, 1894: 230).

For Stowe, a fundamental cornerstone of democratic society was the family unit, with the father at the head, and the mother as efficient, educated, help-mate. But modern society had turned away from the equality that characterized woman's place in ancient Egypt where "she reigned with man – sat on the throne with her husband or brother – equal in influence and authority" (NCWC, 1894: 230).

Modern society, characterized by the unjust separation of public and private spheres, had devalued woman's role and elevated the pursuits and interests of men. She asserted:

the distinction against her, came, when man turned [sic] from the shrine of justice – veiling it with the drape of ambition and selfishness – and engaged in the unholy pursuits of war, dealing death to his brother, and obscurity to woman's worth in the social and economic world (NCWC, 1894: 230).

Thus, for Stowe, modern society was characterized by the ascendance of greed, violence, death, and destruction, which were specifically coded as masculine. And this was possible, in part, due to woman's relegation to the obscurity of the private sphere.

Modern society, characterized by the supremacy of masculine qualities of power, domination, and violence not only prevented the participation of women in the public sphere, it offered a narrow avenue for men's participation as well. She contended that, in order to correct past injustices, women must be able to speak for themselves. Highlighting the extent to which politics was conceptualized as a male domain, she offered this justification for woman suffrage:

Man does not even represent, his own side of human nature to a maximum degree of fulness – and it is therefore safe to infer his inability to represent woman, on any plain of her existence. In view of their natural differentiations each sex must work out its own salvation – in doing which, freedom of action and equality in opportunity must be assured (NCWC, 1894: 231).

That women must be afforded the opportunity to represent themselves had significance not only for their social position, but for the future development and evolution of the nation. “Our social structure is inharmonious, lacks beauty and symmetry, and is showing evident signs of impermanency; and why? Because

truth and justice have not been the corner stones, used by the master builders of the home – the family [*sic*] unit” (NCW, 1894: 232). In this view, the political disfranchisement of Canadian women represented a significant threat to the continued prosperity and stability of the nation. Invoking the idea that the status of a nation was reflected in the position of women, Stowe suggested that the failure to enfranchise women was indicative of moral, social and political myopia.

These arguments were echoed in the words of Stowe's daughter, Augusta Stowe-Gullen who, in 1904, stated:

Equity knows no sex, no class, no color. Invidious distinctions held and perpetuated, whether between man and woman, or one class of society over another, are not in accordance with basic principles, and the country, race, and civilization, which is unmindful of the true spirit of ethics – will ultimately sink into oblivion (NCWC, 1904: 155).

For Stowe and Stowe-Gullen, woman suffrage was the yardstick of progress, an indication of the spirit of democracy, and the key to social and moral uplift.

Stowe-Gullen made these connections explicit when she claimed

character building is the true test of individual or national greatness. So that country, that nation, is worthiest of recognition which comprises the greatest number of highly intelligent, justice-loving citizens (NCWC, 1904: 156).

Hence, woman suffrage became the demonstration of the nation's progress, its enlightenment, and, indeed, its mission. Extending the vote to women would demonstrate the “moral capital” of the Canadian nation (Valverde, 1994). That Canadian women were qualified to vote, to lobby Provincial and Federal governments for this right, and to organize themselves into representative publics illustrated not only their own fitness for the franchise, but also presented an image of Canada as a just, tolerant, and enlightened nation.

While Stowe, and later, Stowe-Gullen, stressed the connection between women's political equality and the legacy of the nation, they also focused on the centrality of the family in the lives of men and women, and as a template for the nation as a whole. Women and men were meant to rule together, but they would have different responsibilities, duties, and roles. Characterizing men as primarily concerned with conquest, war, and violence, Stowe tacitly suggested that women represented stability, prosperity, and peace. A just and civilized nation depended upon the participation of women in the home, and in the nation. Stowe acknowledged the growing prominence of women in public life and suggested that, despite their inexperience, their influence would be for the benefit of humanity:

That women as a whole have not yet outgrown their disabilities, is not surprising, it is safe however to say, they are daily increasing in knowledge, and wisdom, casting behind them the withering influences of the barbarous, and knightly periods, and quietly assuming responsibilities, public and private, through which their evolution is assured (NCWC, 1894: 232-33).

The progress of the nation inevitably depended upon the social elevation and political emancipation of women alongside men. The natural order was equality between men and women: "One is but the complement of the other. Nature is dual, and in all departments of life men and women are intended to be co-mates and co-equals." (NCWC, 1904: 156). The suffrage question, then, was constructed as a rational and reasonable measure that aimed to secure an appropriate position for women in the body politic.

But in addition to rhetoric that cast suffrage as the ultimate sign of a democratic nation, Stowe relied on religious rhetoric to link suffrage to a divine mission. In her early address to Council, she stated:

my hope for harmony in the social and economic realm, rests upon our recognition and application of the Christ principle, love to the brother, and our reception and appropriation of the new commandment given unto us by Him. In it I perceive all necessary theology, a complete plan of salvation, and the establishment of the promised kingdom on earth (NCWC, 1894: 233).

In this view, woman suffrage was not only the sign of educated womanhood and an evolved nation, but clearly an example of God's plan for the world. God's plan was clearly represented through the emancipation of Canadian women and their heralding of a new age, a new dawn, and a new beginning for the nation:

The old building or social edifice with all its magnificence and splendor, but whose plan was conceived in an age of selfishness, ignorance and darkness, is tottering to its fall, and, with the eye of faith, I also perceive a reflection on the horizon of the new one; born of intelligence and light, expressing symmetry, harmony, and beauty in all its parts, its designers or architects having been justice and truth, and its builders or workmen the united heads or dual membership of the family unit, with love as their cementing mortar. In such a social edifice strife and war shall be heard of no more, poverty and sorrow give place to joy, prosperity and peace (NCWC, 1894: 233).

Women's participation in public life would herald a new dawn of social harmony, beauty and symmetry. It was only through the dual participation of men and women that social harmony would be established, but significantly, these characteristics did not undermine the "natural" roles prescribed for men and women. While Stowe offered a wide-ranging critique of the effects and legacy of men's rule, she concluded that

Women Suffragists make no demand involving the abdication of men, either from office or power; what they ask is the removal of all obstacles and artificial barriers, that hinder capable women from exercising their rights as efficient helpmates (NCWC, 1894: 233).

The suffrage question, then, at the outset, indexes a number of important, overlapping, and somewhat contradictory issues with respect to women's roles and responsibilities in Canadian social and political life. First and foremost among them was the contention that women's participation in the official sphere of politics would not herald a social transformation and revolution, but rather, the dawning of a new age of enlightenment, peace, and harmony. What is significant about Stowe's treatise on suffrage is the extent to which she constructed women's roles as supportive of, and ancillary to, the roles of men. While she offered a critique of the one-sided, male-dominated rule of contemporary society, she was careful to assert that women's political roles would be supportive of all that is best for society, and for the nation.

### **Reason, Rationality and Woman Suffrage**

A variety of discourses emerged to construct, shape, limit and enable the articulation of the question of woman suffrage. While the early comments of Emily Stowe, and the arguments of Augusta Stowe-Gullen, offered a critique of the legacy of male-dominated rule, such arguments were constructed against the assumption that woman suffrage would undoubtedly positively affect the nation and its legacy. Of central concern in the discussions on woman suffrage was the perception that such a measure tore at the fabric of society, encouraged women to forsake their "natural" realm for the world of politics, and would have a deleterious effect upon social harmony and the legacy of the nation. It was in response to the apparent radicalism of such issues that Council discourses on suffrage focused on the inherent rationality of woman suffrage.

These discourses defined suffrage as a democratic right, as part and parcel of a project of social reform, and as an indication of woman's ability to serve. Additionally, responding to the charge that woman suffrage indicated an "unfriendly attitude" toward men, Council discourses created separate public roles for men and women. Focusing on the extent to which the state had intruded into the private sphere, Council members argued that women had a right to participate in public issues, especially those which affected children, and that, since women paid taxes, they had a responsibility to ensure the appropriate use of those dollars. Women were expected to use their votes wisely and judiciously to elect men of good standing and character. Nowhere in these discussions of women's political responsibilities was there the suggestion that women themselves should run for public office. Rather, their central responsibility was to elevate the tone of public life, to purify politics, and hold men to a higher standard. It is through this construction of women's political duties and responsibilities that suffrage indexed a transcendent form of citizenship for Canadian women.

### **Suffrage as a Democratic Right**

As early as 1872, Canadian women were acquiring voting privileges. Bennett (1986) notes that in that year, "women property owners in British Columbia, single or married, were permitted to vote in city elections" (378). In Ontario, widows and spinsters who held property had won municipal voting privileges in 1883 and by 1887, single and married women in Manitoba were granted the municipal vote (Bennett, 1986: 378). Provincial and federal voting privileges were

granted much later, however. Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan were the first provinces to enfranchise women, extending the vote in 1916. By 1922, all Provinces had enfranchised women, except Quebec, where women were not enfranchised until 1940 (Bennett, 1986: 378; Errington, 1988: 71). It was not until the introduction of the Military Voters' Act and the Wartime Elections Act in 1917 that women were partially enfranchised federally. In 1918 and 1920, Prime Minister Borden introduced the Women's Franchise Act and the Dominion Elections Act which extended voting privileges to all Canadian women (Errington, 1988: 72).

Given that women had municipal voting privileges in the late 1870s and early 1880s, it is perhaps not surprising that, in the 1890s, Council members were concerned with how women should exercise their privileges. In these early discussions of women's voting rights and their attendant responsibilities, Council members defined suffrage as a civil and democratic right. In her 1897 address on "The Voting Privileges of Canadian Women and Their Responsibilities in Regard to Them," Henrietta Muir Edwards offered an indication of the sort of public debate that the issue engendered.

First, woman's municipal responsibilities. Who put them on her? On the right answer to this question depends very much the weight of the responsibilities. We hear several voices replying in different tones. The legal voice says: 'Men, they made the laws.' A very conservative woman's voice says: 'It was that dreadful new woman; we did not want any voting privileges nor any responsibilities put upon us; it was the new woman.' 'I am not a new woman,' says another voice, 'but I moved, petitioned, addressed meetings and procured for us, you and me, these privileges.' I do not think it was any or all of these. It was the strongest possible formative force in the world – an idea. The idea which has become in some countries a political belief. The idea expressed in the politician's creed – 'No taxation without representation' (NCWC, 1897: 174-5).

For Edwards, woman suffrage was the natural progression of equality and democracy, expressed not in overtly ideological or political terms, but in the simple democratic idea of equality of representation under the law. With this understanding of the importance of woman suffrage, then, a woman's responsibilities were clear:

It is your duty then to follow your taxes as far as you can. Every woman who has the privilege of helping to send a good man to spend her money for her and does not, is partially responsible for the maladministration of the civic funds if they are mis-spent (NCWC, 1897: 175).

Suggesting that the city was a home writ large, Edwards equated woman's municipal voting rights with fiscal responsibility. But what is additionally significant about her defence of woman suffrage was her placement of women's political duties as supportive of, and ancillary to, men. Woman's political responsibility was to ensure that she prudently selected the appropriate man to represent her. The municipal woman voter had the duty and responsibility to elect good men, but what was absent from this defence of woman suffrage was the suggestion that she had the right to run for political office herself.

Perhaps it is the image of women entering into previously male-dominated domains that presented the greatest potential threat posed by woman suffrage. Indeed, Council discussions of the issue suggest the existence of concern over women leaving their proper domains and potentially revolutionizing Canadian society. It was against these perceptions of the apparent radicalism of suffrage that Council members focused on its socially conservative and reformist character. There was the sense that Canadian society was changing, and suffrage rhetoric attempted to ensure that this change would be socially

beneficial. As demonstrated by the comments of Mrs. Cairus-Wilson, who stated: "I think we must all feel that a change must come, and when it does come it will not be revolutionary but be conservative of all that is worth conserving in our national life" (NCWC, 1897: 177). This perspective demonstrates what Bacchi (1983) has referred to as the socially conservative focus of the English-Canadian suffragists. For Bacchi, suffrage was not a revolutionary movement, but rather, an issue seized upon by women who wanted to secure a role for themselves in the creation of the nation.

Sonia Leathes, in her 1913 address to Council, made an explicit connection between democracy and woman suffrage. Outlining the various ways that opposition to woman suffrage was undemocratic, she argued that the principles of representative government demanded woman's enfranchisement.

Quoting Wendell Phillips to support her argument, she stated:

'Our divine sense of justice tells us that the being who is to be governed by laws, should first assent to them, that the being who is to be taxed shall have a voice in fixing the character and amount of the financial burdens which it is to bear. Then, if woman is to be made responsible before the law, if she is admitted to the gallows, to the jail and to the tax lists, we have no right to debar her from the ballot box' (NCWC, 1913: 69).

In this sense, woman suffrage was the hallmark of an orderly, civilized, and democratic nation. Additionally, the enfranchisement of women was an indication of their increasing status as fully-functioning and contributing members of society. That women were subject to the laws of the nation, and yet, were given no voice in provincial or federal affairs, was a sign of an immature democracy.

## **Suffrage and Social Reform**

Roberts (1979) and Bacchi (1983) have both acknowledged the extent to which the suffrage movement in Canada was largely conservative in nature, and was, in fact, seized upon by social reformers in order to advance their specific causes. That these particular approaches to woman suffrage found expression and support in Council should not be surprising, since Council was primarily concerned with aspects of social and moral reform. The connection between suffrage and social reform was, however, rarely explicitly stated in Council meetings, or by Council members. Rather, this connection was suggested by speakers who stressed what women would achieve through the use of the suffrage.

Addressing Council members on "The Struggle Against Tuberculosis," Dr. Bryce, Chief Medical Examiner for the Dominion, made these telling remarks:

Now, ladies, here is a situation demanding your attention. We see to-day the women of England demanding the right to vote. Female property owners, widows and spinsters, have this right now in our municipal elections. Is it not possible that this Association can so concentrate its energies that public bodies, and especially our provincial and municipal legislators, can be brought to see that if the fight against tuberculosis is to be made effective, there must be appointed trained men and women whose whole time will be given to this work of social uplifting (NCWC, 1908: 35-6).

While not specifically addressing the issue of woman suffrage, Bryce's comments suggest that suffrage would provide women with political clout in order to advance their reform agenda. The question of woman suffrage was separated from women's political rights in favour of a focus on social and moral reform, and women's "proper" use of their voting privileges. More to the point, Bryce's comments suggest an important role for the NCWC in raising public awareness

and informing public opinion on the importance of appointing “trained men and women” who can commit to “this work of social uplifting.”

This “proper” use of women's votes was encouraged as early as 1897, when a Council member related the story of a woman who finally decided to use her voting privileges in electing school board trustees. For this woman, at least according to the account in the Yearbook, voting was an expression of her commitment to a program of social reform:

When the vote on the question of the introduction of cooking and sewing into the schools came up ... I saw that certain of these trustees voted against the introduction of these subjects [and] I concluded it was my duty to record my vote, and to help put men on the Board who were in favor of these reforms (NCWC, 1897: 181-2).

That suffrage was seen as providing women with political clout in order to advance other social causes should not be surprising given the degree of concern over social issues such as poverty, violence, desertion, alcoholism and prostitution. But what is significant about this discussion within Council is that women's political participation was constructed as having a positive moral influence on male representatives. Within Council discussions on woman suffrage, women were routinely and repeatedly encouraged to vote for “good men,” but they were rarely, if ever, encouraged to stand for public office themselves. In this sense, then, woman suffrage was increasingly constructed as more concerned with women's political “influence” than with their political equality.

## **Suffrage and Protecting the Home**

That the question of woman suffrage emerged at a time of urbanization, immigration, and modernization has been duly noted by social historians (see Kealey, 1979; Bacchi, 1983; Mitchinson, 1987; Prentice, 1988; Errington, 1988, Morrison, 1976). It is important to stress the extent to which these social, political and national concerns also shaped justifications for woman suffrage. I have focused on how the suffrage question, as presented in Council meetings, was constructed as an inherently democratic measure that sought to preserve and conserve the nation's values. These debates focused on women's equal democratic rights, their political responsibilities, and the wise use of their voting privileges. As such these discourses also attempted to define, secure, and solidify appropriate gender roles and expectations. At various times in Council meetings, suffrage was endorsed on the grounds that it offered protection for the home and a public voice for Canadian mothers. Within these discussions, public life was conceptualized as requiring the participation of men and women, who represented the different, yet interrelated spheres of the nation and the home, politics and morality, the public and the private.

May Wright-Sewell, president of the National Council of Women of the United States, addressed the NCWC in 1898 and drew out the different duties and responsibilities of women and men. The summarized account of her address states:

women were unlike men, and possessed tastes, interests and occupations which they alone could adequately represent, women needed the ballot for the protection of those interests, and for the safety of that home, which is ever woman's first thought, while men more particularly represent the material interests of the world (NCWC, 1898: 386).

For Wright-Sewell, as for several other members of the NCWC, suffrage was a specific measure to enfranchise the “mothers of the nation,” to ensure that the home was represented and protected, and that women would have a voice in the creation of laws that affected their children. Perhaps responding to early speeches by Emily Stowe, which offered a critique of the legacy of male dominated rule, Wright-Sewell's comments served to reinforce the perception that woman suffrage was not a revolution in waiting, but rather the road to national greatness, for Canada, as well as the United States. Careful to ensure that the cause of woman suffrage should not be interpreted as critical of men's abilities, Wright-Sewell maintained women must have a voice in public affairs and be able to represent the interests of the home.

Man or woman alone is incomplete, for one is the complement of the other, and should stand side by side and work hand in hand. Each has especial duties to perform, to encounter and overcome, which cannot be subverted or vicariously borne by another, and the future evolutionary progress, happiness and well-being of the race depends upon the right performance of these duties and the assumption of their own responsibilities (NCWC, 1898: 387).

Woman suffrage, therefore, did not entail the displacement of men from the seat of power, nor did it signal women's abandonment of their place within the domestic sphere. Rather, woman suffrage discourses sought to expand the definition of the political to account for women's activism, but also served to reinforce the gendered domains of the public and the private.

### **Women, Motherhood and Suffrage**

Council arguments in support of votes for Canadian mothers also expressed a concern that “there were too many of the wrong kind of woman voting” (NCWC,

1896: 545). Both widows and spinsters were eligible to vote in municipal and school board elections, and this provided a source of frustration for women in Council. As Edwards noted in her address on women's voting privileges,

Women's voting privileges in some places are confined to widows and spinsters. I find it a little difficult to address these privileged ladies. *Their responsibilities are so great for their qualifications.* I do not wish to disparage the spinster, but it seems to me a strange thing for the city father to ask the maiden aunt to advise him about his children (NCWC, 1897:175, emphasis added).

Tacit in this approach was the assumption that motherhood was the appropriate qualification for women's participation in public, social and educational matters. This is additionally significant not only because it created a role for Canadian mothers, but that this role was justified because the issues related to children. It is only through the emergence of children as objects of concern that women were able to articulate an understanding of citizenship and political participation.

In her 1907 "Report on the Committee on Political Equality," Stowe-Gullen complained that "the ballot is given to a limited class – unmarried women and widows – the class least likely to be keenly interested in the protection of home and nation" (NCWC, 1907: 68). Widows and spinsters emerged as a problem (and convenient scapegoats) in Council discussions of the suffrage question. Responding to the claim that women did not use the voting privileges already given them, a spokesperson for the Canadian Suffrage Association claimed

Undoubtedly the classes possessing the franchise (unmarried women and widows) have not exercised their privilege to the full extent, not realizing that this apathy would prove an effectual barrier to the progress of other women and prevent the granting of the legislative vote (NCWC, 1911: xxvii).

While there was an acknowledgment that women did not make proper use of their existing voting privileges, there was also the contention that it was woman's status as mother that provided her with the requisite qualifications (in this case unselfishness, concern for the home, care for others) to transcend the "narrow provincialism of self" and participate in the shaping of social and public issues (NCWC, 1894: 221).

But additionally, the focus on votes for mothers had ramifications for how the suffrage issue was constructed and understood. At various times in Council discussions, women's (mother's) responsibilities to future male generations emerged as a defence of suffrage. This justification for woman suffrage found expression beyond the confines of the National Council. In 1911, for example, A.G. MacKay, the leader of the Opposition in Ontario, acknowledged that "the enfranchised woman would not rock the cradle less, but would rock it with a more confident hand, if she knew that she had the power to make the laws for the future environment of the son within the cradle" (NCWC, 1911: xxix). This concern to play a role in the creation of the social and political environment for future generations also motivated Sonia Leathes's defence of woman suffrage. In her discussion of the democratic right of women to political equality she underscored the valuable role that mothers have in raising their sons. She asked, rhetorically: "And what nation can hope to produce public-spirited men, as long as it continues to discourage the mothers from taking that interest in its collective concerns which only direct responsibility can create and keep up" (NCWC, 1913: 70).

A woman's responsibility to foster a sense of public-spiritedness and civic duty in her sons was also stressed by Jean Blewett, in her 1903 address on "Woman as Citizen." But what was significant for Blewett was that she maintained that woman's role as mother provided her with all the political and social influence she needed to make a valuable contribution to Canadian society. She contended that women fulfilled their most important duties as citizens by raising their children appropriately.

To teach a boy that right and truth are grander things than wealth, high place, or the applause of men, is to make of that boy a man whose private life will be an exemplary one, and whose public life will be above suspicion... Put the stamp of honor and high ideals in those sons of yours, you mothers of Canada, and we will have in them, by and by, public officials of incorruptible probity; men who will make our nation great and strong (NCWC, 1903: 80).

What is significant about these seemingly competing discourses is the extent to which motherhood emerged as an important, but ultimately de-politicized, designation for Canadian women. At the same time that motherhood was invoked to justify a public role for Canadian women, it was understood and constructed in such a way as to contain the actions and activities of women. First and foremost, a mother's primary responsibility was and remained her home, her husband, and her children. But it was these primary interests that suffragists invoked in justifying votes for women. Hence, there was a sense that women were able to abstract themselves from their own personal interests and needs, but only by subverting those for a focus on the family. Predicated on the assumption that politics must be concerned with issues of common interest, the suffrage issue took what was assumed to be the personal interests of women (home, family, children) and constructed these issues as imperative for the nation

as a whole. But even in this scheme, women were denied political subjectivity – they were able to claim status as citizens only to the extent that they purported to represent interests other than their own.

### **Suffrage, Motherhood and Purifying Politics**

The apparent conflict between women as equal political actors and women as maternal citizens underscores Council discussions on woman suffrage.

Discussions of women's rights and responsibilities hinged on the understanding of women as mothers, as self-sacrificing, and as a potential purifying influence in the public sphere. Hence, women's roles as citizens were defined as extensions of their responsibilities within the home. Stopping short of endorsing full political equality for women, this understanding of women's citizenship was able to buttress support for suffrage, at the same time that it suggested that women did not need to stand for public office in order to have political "influence."

In her 1903 address to Council on "Woman as a Citizen," Jean Blewett invoked the image of separate and gendered public spheres. Maintaining that women's role in public life as moral and social reformer was the apex of her identity as citizen, she argued that women were better without formal suffrage.

Every little while one bolder than her sisters goes up to the door of politics, but is gently and firmly refused admission. *She is better out of it all.* It is more than hinted at by those who have golden glimpses behind the scenes that the great hall-door of politics will never swing open to such clear-eyed, white-skirted individuals as the women of this country, until the men behind it have had time to get through with a spring house-clearing which has been long delayed (NCWC, 1903: 81; added emphasis).

Blewett's suggestion that politics was a realm too corrupt for the participation of women accorded with a general argument that was employed to deny women

such opportunities. This perspective was at odds with the general sentiment within the Council that women's participation would purify and elevate public life. For Blewett, however, women would be lowering themselves to participate in politics, and they must take comfort in the knowledge that "the influence of a good woman is one of the strongest agents God has in the world to-day" (NCWC, 1903: 81).

Women's responsibility to elevate and purify the tone of public life was a theme that connected woman suffrage with nation-building and the establishment of the just rule of a predominantly white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant nation. James L. Hughes, a prominent educational reformer, addressed the NCWC immediately after Blewett and focused on the themes of progress, civilization and evolution in his discussion on the responsibilities of citizenship.

Every citizen should be in politics ... The race moves slowly in its progressive evolution, because so many refrain from the performance of their highest duty in endeavoring to transform conditions and promote a higher civilization by public effort to crystalize their best ideals into law (NCWC, 1903: 82).

This promotion of a higher civilization depended upon the equal participation of men and women: "Women's influence would not only purify and elevate the tone of public life," Hughes continues, "it would strengthen and define the entire political aims and processes of humanity" (NCWC, 1903: 82). It was women's role in the progress of humanity that cast the suffrage question as a fundamentally conservative and moderate political measure that aimed to preserve and strengthen the social order. But additionally significant in these perspectives is the acknowledgment that women have a moral duty to participate

in public life, although their participation is limited to those areas where they can affect a positive moral influence.

### **Suffrage, Individuality and Women's Collective Rights**

In her analysis of the emergence of the women's movement in the United States, DuBois (1978) maintains that suffrage was an important issue because through it women fought to "establish some kind of independent position outside the home" (136). Through mobilizing for the suffrage, women created a political subjectivity that was not mediated by male relatives or spouses. "They believed that as citizens, women would be acting along with men as individual members of the community, not as part of their families" (136). But in the Council's discussions of women's responsibilities to home and to nation, there was the attempt to reconcile women's domestic responsibilities with their individual rights. In the attempt to link women's "citizenship" with their domestic responsibilities and maternal identity, Council sought to expand the understanding of citizenship to include women. Acknowledging that women had different interests and different spheres of influence than men, Council discourses on suffrage maintained that women had responsibilities not only to their children, but also to themselves. In these discourses, women are duty-bound to shake off the injustices of the past and prepare themselves to assume roles of public significance. For Stowe-Gullen, women's maternal duties had specifically interfered with the development of a *mentalité* that would enable them to gain recognition as citizens:

Some of the existing impediments to woman's progress towards the complete establishment of her recognition by the state have been her own primitive perception of just principles – the excessive development of the maternal love nature, her

willingness to be led, to be utilized, and quietly submit to the appropriation of her labors without due recognition and recompensation (NCWC, 1904: 157).

For the sake of the development and progress of civilization, women must elevate and educate themselves and prepare to assume public and political responsibilities:

Now, as our freedom from existing disabilities is largely dependent upon our own efforts, it behooves us to awaken from our apathy, and to rightfully understand our assigned and actual position in the body politic, and to accord to these questions careful and unprejudiced consideration, for individually and collectively, we work out or [sic] salvation (NCWC, 1904: 156).

That women had emerged as an important social and political force was a significant feature of discussions on woman suffrage. For Stowe-Gullen, women's increasing political maturity was demonstrated through the careful consideration of their role in the body politic, the discussion of various social and political issues, and the formation of organizations to assist and enable women's participation in public life. In these developments, epitomized by the formation of the NCWC, women are seen to be creating an autonomous relationship to the state, and within Canadian society.

But again, there was a significant tension between perspectives that championed women's recognition as equal citizens, and those that stressed their moral and spiritual influence. In 1897, Edwards addressed the suffrage issue by discussing women's autonomy and independence. She stated:

The responsibilities in regard to this question of voting revolve, as do all her other responsibilities, religious, social and civic, around the one great question as to her separate identity. If she is only the supplementary part of man (which many women profess to believe) she can have no individual responsibility. This belief was the idea upon which all laws and customs were originally founded. As civilization, education, and above all, the teachings of Christ

advanced, this primal idea of women has changed, and step by step good men have taught women the responsibilities placed upon her by God, that she must think and act for herself (NCWC, 1897: 176-77).

While Edwards challenged the assumption that women were ancillary to men, she did so in a contradictory way that privileged men's roles as exemplars to women. The responsibilities that women have to participate in public life were responsibilities that had been imparted to them by men. Indeed, if women were to achieve greater political recognition, such recognition had to be extended to them by male politicians. However, for Edwards, women's responsibilities were constructed as moral duties, rather than political or civic responsibilities. The role of religion is an important force in Edwards's account and is additionally significant for contributing to the definition of separate, gendered, public spheres. For Edwards, it was through the advancement of God's word and Christ's teachings that women had entered into public life. They had done so, however, to advance Christ's mission, not to win acclaim and recognition for themselves. Women's political subjectivity, then, is transcendent to the extent that it extends beyond her physical and earthly existence to incorporate a religious mission.

In order to receive political recognition, women must be able to demonstrate that they represented more than their own personal interests. For Council members like Edwards, this was achieved through the rhetorical construction of women as expressions of the Infinite and through their apparent moral influence. But for women like Stowe-Gullen, woman suffrage was defended on the grounds that it would benefit society, purify politics, and elevate the social status of Canadian women.

Womanly character is broadened and ennobled by patriotism and an intelligent interest in all public questions, so let us hasten the glad time when every human being will occupy the common platform of an equality of interests and opportunities, and good government is the natural sequence (NCWC, 1904: 159).

This explicit connection between women's social elevation, their recognition of their independence, and nation-building was continually stressed by Stowe-Gullen, who argued

Woman is a separate individual personality, a responsible human soul, and woman's first and greatest duty is to Woman. Woman must abandon her subjection with its resultant negativity, cultivate her faculties and powers to the utmost, and fully realize her truly divine position in the scheme of life; the mother of the race, and the evolution of the race our ultimate destiny (NCWC, 1908: 87).

Educated, enlightened and enfranchised women would lead the nation to a new dawn of progress, of civility and of moral influence.

In a brief discussion on the effects of woman suffrage, Stowe-Gullen drew on the notion of woman's purifying influence to justify obtaining the Provincial and Federal franchise. She commented that in Australia and New Zealand, where women were enfranchised in 1903 and 1893 respectively (Eley, 1992: 313),

family life has been strengthened with a new sympathy. Politics gained a new influence, full of high motives, and comparatively free from commercialism; the home has gained additional force in political life; character, more weight in elections, party and money less (NCWC, 1904: 160).

Further, within Canada's borders, there had been an appreciable improvement in political life:

Since the granting of the municipal franchise to spinsters and widows the question is frequently asked: 'What are the results? Have they been beneficial?' We reply, Yes, undoubtedly; greater toleration in the public thought, better men in office (NCWC, 1907: 67).

These perspectives are important because while they focus on women as individual actors, they still position women as above politics, rather than as part and parcel of political procedures and practices. Even when women have voting privileges, they are not discussed as having direct interests, but rather exerting a moral influence on the tone of politics and the character of men elected. In this view women – already rhetorically presented as the mothers of the race – are configured as parental figures, leading politics and national life to a higher moral ground.

### **Woman Suffrage, War, and Peace**

At the Annual Meeting in 1915, Stowe-Gullen was at pains to stress women's self-sacrifice and their inherently peaceful nature as reasons for their enfranchisement. While she continually stressed women's independence, it was their connection to others, specifically to children, which best prepared and qualified them for a role in public life. Women's social and moral elevation would result in increased peace, prosperity, and more importantly, the possibility of an end to war.

Women suffer in giving life and therefore more keenly realize the value of human life – and believing as they do in the 'Higher Patriotism' which depends upon sincerity, truth, services, sane legislation, conservation of life, good faith between individuals and nations – women as a class are naturally opposed to war (NCWC, 1915: 253).

Women's privileged position as the bearer of children, "the construction force of mankind – the preserver of life" ensures that she must have a hand in the public and political issues facing the nation (NCWC, 1915: 256). Stressing women's

moral superiority, their commitment to the preservation of life, Stowe-Gullen linked woman suffrage to the hope for national and international stability at a time of destruction and chaos. It was this elevated position that women must strive to embody, indeed, as “expressions of the infinite,” it was women’s moral duty to assume these roles (NCWC, 1915: 256).

These discourses have characterized the discussion of woman suffrage in Council meetings before the granting of the federal franchise to Canadian women. These debates comprised a discursive field through which women’s social position, public duties, and political responsibilities were contested, challenged, and constructed. While many of these perspectives offered a critique of women’s disadvantaged position within modern society, they often served to reinforce their subordinated status by refusing to challenge their role and position within the family. Those perspectives that did challenge such positions – perspectives offered sporadically by Emily Stowe and her daughter Augusta Stowe-Gullen – sought to justify a public role for Canadian women through elevating and mythologizing their maternal function. Hence, in this case, gender identity functions as a generalized form of communication, in the sense offered by Jean Cohen (1995). Gender identity operates to foreclose any questioning of women’s assumed natural role as mother. It is through their identity as mother that women are seen to acquire the attributes necessary to assume an important role in Canadian public life. But this role must be understood as an extension of women’s moral responsibilities in the home.

This assessment has focused on how Council framed the issue of woman suffrage as it was emerging as an issue of public concern. This discussion will

now turn to a consideration of how Council members reacted to the granting of the Provincial and Federal franchise.

### **Provincial Suffrage and Women's Responsibilities**

By 1917, women in Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia and Ontario had gained Provincial voting privileges (Geller, 1976: 89; Cleverdon, 1974). In her welcoming address at the Annual Meeting of 1917, Margaret McWilliams, President of the Winnipeg Local Council, made an explicit link between women's work in support of the war, and the winning of the franchise:

The courage, the self-forgetfulness, the persistency, and the resourcefulness which the women of Canada have displayed in all forms of war works, or should I say all forms of work since war broke out – have in greater part of the Country swept away the last barriers of prejudices and misunderstandings which in the minds of men stood between us and the franchise (NCWC, 1917: 11).

Presenting suffrage as a reward for women's "war work," this view is significant for focusing on suffrage as an acknowledgment and recognition of women's role and position in Canadian society, rather than as the recognition of their political equality. Additionally, the winning of the suffrage is seen as an inevitable result of women's persistent and tireless work that successfully swept away the "barriers of prejudices and misunderstandings" that prevented women from gaining the vote. There is a tacit belief here that suffrage is a rational and reasonable measure, that through methodical, measured, reasonable actions and arguments, men were made to realize the error of their ways. Hence, the sharing of information and perspectives, the participation in an ongoing moral

conversation about suffrage, and the concerted effort to inform public opinion on the matter indicates that women are able to serve the nation.

But despite the moderation expressed in these statements, there was also the sense that women were now able to enjoy a legitimacy and authority that had been lacking previously:

no woman could have been in public life in the last 15 months in Manitoba without realizing that we have come into entirely new days. For ourselves we seem to stand more squarely on our own feet, we have a new sense of responsibility of opportunities; from others we seem to receive willing recognition of the new plane in which we stand, a welcome is given to us as equals which rings far more true than that which often greeted us in our so-called 'pedestal' state of former days (NCWC, 1917: 13).

The granting of the provincial suffrage lent a new legitimacy to women in public life, and provided a sense of individual accomplishment and responsibility, but also acknowledged the important work that women had done in social and moral reform. Furthermore, the provincial suffrage was viewed as an important acknowledgment of women as political equals, a status that they had not previously enjoyed.

This acknowledgment of woman's important public role was celebrated as an indication of the power of organized womanhood. Extending the franchise to these "organized women" would have an important unifying role for the Canadian nation. Describing the past tensions between East and West, McWilliams suggested that the NCWC presented the opportunity to bridge these gaps.

It was our hope that here perhaps more than anywhere else would it be possible for East to meet West. It was our further hope that in that meeting, in the impact of the mind of the East on the mind of the West, in the free exchange of ideas there might arise a new and better understanding, there might come an acceptance of a new tolerance and breadth of views that should be not East or West, but National (NCWC, 1917: 14).

Hence, organized womanhood, represented through Council, has important nation-building and unifying abilities. These sentiments were echoed in the words of Council President Rosaline Torrington who stated:

A nation never rises above the status of its women. For nation-builders we need women of splendid patriotism, lofty ideals, International as well as Imperial ideas, and undaunted faith. We must have co-operation between women of the East and of the West, so that the force of the vote will form the connecting link in the chain. Let us strengthen it. It has been said that East is East and West is West. But there is no East and no West as far as nation-building is concerned (NCWC, 1917: 19).

After the granting of the Provincial franchise Council focused on the role that women were expected to play in the political process. It is in these discussions that woman's citizenship was characterized as transcendent. As Torrington stated:

A sceptre, in the form of a ballot, has been placed in the hands of every woman, not that by her vote and influence she may strengthen the Liberal or Conservative party, but in order that she may protect the highest interests of her hearth and home, and help to establish the law of righteousness, or right living, which alone exalteth a nation, and remove the social sins and inequalities which are a reproach to any people (NCWC, 1917: 18).

Women voters were expected and encouraged to rise above petty political allegiances to represent a higher patriotism, lofty ideals and the law of righteousness that would elevate individuals, as well as the nation. The granting of the provincial franchise was an indication that "the future of Canada lies in the home. The victory won on the battlefield must be followed by a realization of the power of consecrated motherhood ... Upon woman rests the responsibility, in great measure, of the development of a higher civilization" (NCWC, 1917: 16).

Now that women had gained the legitimacy of political equality and recognition, it was imperative that their participation was for the benefit of humanity and the elevation of the nation.

### **Organized Womanhood and the Responsibilities of Citizenship**

Perhaps it is not surprising that the Council emerges as the organization that enables women to have this national influence. As Torrington argued: "The National Council of Women will prove an ideal organization if the women live up to their privileges. After all this Council is a mosaic glowing in the many colours of women's varying activities, where shade blends into shade, making a perfect whole" (NCWC, 1917: 19). Council provides an invaluable service to Canadian women, and by extension, to the entire nation. As McWilliams noted in her address, Council was "an organization through which the voice of women of this country, the lesser as well as the greater, could be effectually heard in all that wide range of interests outside the restricted field of politics" (NCWC, 1917: 12).

Throughout the discussion on woman suffrage, elevated womanhood, and "consecrated motherhood," there was also the acknowledgment of the role played by Council in furnishing women with a vehicle to demonstrate their abilities, to publicize and draw attention to their interests and to participate in issues of relevance to nation-building.

It is well also to point out that from the nature of its organization and work, the Council is wonderfully adapted to be a medium wherein national interests may be studied, a national viewpoint gained, and a national education in public affairs may be carried on by its members (NCWC, 1917: 22).

In this sense, Council provides women with specific "training" in social and political issues, helping them to assume the roles of leadership, influence and prestige upon which the emerging nation depends.

It is worth remembering that Council only endorsed woman suffrage in 1910, a relatively late date given the affiliation of the Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Association with the Council since 1893. However, as Bacchi (1983) argues, it was Council's endorsement in 1910 that lent the suffrage issue a degree of authority and legitimacy that it had not previously enjoyed. For various members of the Council, the concern with endorsing woman suffrage was that the Council would sacrifice public sympathy and support if it was to endorse a specific political issue. That the winning of the Provincial franchise was greeted as an acknowledgment of women's self-sacrifice, their patriotism, and their tireless work attests to the positioning of Canadian women as guardians of the home, as moral exemplars, and as social reformers. While social historians such as Bacchi and Roberts contend that Council successfully de-politicized the suffrage question, it is my contention that the issue is rather more complex and contradictory. Within Council discussions, woman suffrage confronts concerns and questions over women's roles and social responsibilities, their increasing social significance and visibility, and their quest to play a role in the development of a just nation.

At the Annual Meeting of 1918, Council members celebrated the extension of the Federal franchise to Canadian women. But these celebrations were tempered with the acknowledgment that with these new privileges come

responsibilities, and Council members were at pains to stress that women must live up to these expectations.

May the women of Canada wield this mighty power for the advancement and progress of our Country. We all have a vision of this dear land of ours – ‘God’s Country,’ as our boys call it – rearing its head among the nations of the earth, a strong, vigorous, high-minded youth, whose influence for good will make itself felt, even as our young Canadian manhood has made itself felt in the fields of France and Flanders (NCWC, 1918: 24).

This statement, which masculinizes the Canadian nation, additionally provides the image of the Canadian mother as social and national force. The ability of the strong, vigorous Canadian nation to have a positive influence on the state of world affairs depends on the proper role played by Canadian women: the moral rearing of their sons, their commitment to high ideals, patriotism, and purity of living.

Again, discussion on the roles and responsibilities of newly enfranchised Canadian women leads to discussion on the role of the National Council in facilitating their work. “It must be the duty of the National Council to lead the way, through her many affiliated societies, and make Canadian women measure up in some small way to our brave men who have given themselves for the cause of democracy, even unto death” (NCWC, 1918: 24). It is through affiliation with Council that Canadian women are able to live up to the sacrifices suffered for them by Canadian men.

That the franchise was granted to Canadian women during the First World War had a significant impact on its reception within Council. While the Council had always been concerned to present the issue as a moderate and reasonable measure, there was some criticism of the legacy of men’s rule and the

unjustness of women's disfranchisement. However, these critical perspectives were absent from the discussion of the granting of the Federal franchise. Council members proceeded to extol the virtues of "good citizenship," which was constructed against the individual concerns of political equality.

As the *privilege* of government is now in large measure ours, so, too, is the accompanying *responsibility* of government. We have sought it; let us see to it that it becomes, in our hands, the defender of every righteous cause. Upon good citizenship is dependent the future of our race (NCWC, 1918: 25, original emphasis).

Even Stowe-Gullen, ever critical of men's injustice to women, presented the suffrage as an unqualified success, despite the fact that women who were married to "enemy aliens" were disfranchised. In her discussion of the passage of the bill to enfranchise Canadian women, she commented:

An interesting point in connection with the bill is that if a woman is married to an alien enemy she is disfranchised. Thus a woman who was formerly a British subject would not have the vote if she became the wife of a German, Austrian, Turk, Bulgarian or any other enemy alien (NCWC, 1918: 59).

What is significant about this is that she made no critical appraisal of this move. Instead, she focused on the inevitable good that would result from women's participation in public and political affairs stating, "there need be no fears as to the ultimate service to mankind of the woman voter" (NCWC, 1918: 59). Geller (1976) stresses the overtly political justifications for extending the franchise to women during the war. Noting that the Wartime Elections Act of 1917 specifically enfranchised women with male relatives on active duty while disfranchising those married to "enemy aliens," she contends that women's enfranchisement served to return the Borden government to power and to secure support for conscription

(89). In conjunction with these overtly political functions of women's enfranchisement, there was the additional feminization of their citizenship. Women's political identities were reflections of their position within a male-defined family. Their access to citizenship was mediated through their relationships with men: "good" female citizens were those who married Canadian or British men, and sent their sons to fight a just war, while women who married "enemy aliens" or who did not have sons, brothers or other male relatives fighting the war were simply – and justifiably – beyond the pale.

Throughout Council discourses on woman suffrage woman herself emerges as a conflicted and ambiguous character. She is routinely celebrated as the saviour of humanity, as God's emissary, as an "expression of the infinite," as self-sacrificing, as selfless, loving and peaceful. But there is also a counter narrative of women's potential threat to the stability of the nation. Before the granting of the Provincial and Federal franchise, Council members often complained that the wrong type of women were allowed to vote, that widows and spinsters were not qualified to express opinions about issues affecting families. But additionally, and less overtly, there is an underlying concern that women needed to be encouraged to assume roles of moral leadership, that just as women could herald the rise of a glorious era, they could also be its downfall. This ambiguity may explain the lack of criticism of the disfranchisement of women married to "enemy aliens". Tacit in this approach is the assumption that suffrage is a political and moral privilege given to Canadian women, who marry Canadian men, and bear Canadian children. Making distinctions between worthy and unworthy women, Council members defined the suffrage issue as an

expression of Canadian patriotism, and a specific reward for women's nation-building efforts.

### **Suffrage and Mothering the Nation**

This chapter has focused on the various, multiple, and overlapping discourses on woman suffrage articulated by the members of the National Council of Women of Canada. This analysis began with the argument that the question of woman suffrage provided women in Council with an opportunity to create, challenge, and construct public opinion about women's role in Canadian society. Premised upon the assumption that woman suffrage was a potentially de-stabilizing force in Canadian society, the resulting discourse focused upon women's responsibilities to their home, their children, and their nation.

In a recent article, Carol Bacchi and Chris Beasley (2002) postulate a notion of "embodied citizenship" to suggest ways of getting past the challenges of malestream political theory that is premised on the assumption that political actors can abstract themselves through discourse (see Warner, 1990). Instead, they suggest that feminist theory must find ways to conceptualize how political theory constructs bodies, and how bodies are the site of political theories and various policies. This chapter illustrates that a notion of "embodied citizenship" was present in discourses on woman suffrage in Council meetings, but that this discourse focused on woman's difference, her maternal function, and her presumed link to the Infinite. Within Council discourses on woman suffrage, women's bodies occupied a liminal space. Their embodied-ness – the ability to bear children – marked their difference from the universal political subject, but

this difference was invoked by women themselves to strengthen their position within the body politic. But, at the same time, such discourses attempt to “purify” this sexualized body through sacred and religious discourses that linked such creative functions to the work of God, and constructed women’s maternal abilities as expressions of the Infinite.

Women’s identity as mother is central to the discourses on suffrage, as they are responsible for the bearing of future generations, as well as the rearing of the nation’s sons. It is curious that women’s role in raising the nation’s daughters was not stressed as a rationalization for their political recognition. This absence of discussion on women’s responsibilities to their daughters further suggests the ambiguity of women’s status as autonomous political actors. While Council discourses illustrated the extent to which women’s role as mother justified their enfranchisement, their maternal identity was, apparently, only significant if they were the mothers of male children. I have already acknowledged Council’s reluctance to encourage women to participate actively in political processes. Through representing women as mothers of a masculine nation, this neglect extends to a failure to conceptualize their daughters as future political actors.

Through these discourses, women’s political responsibilities were enabled and justified through their position within a male-defined family. Women were presented as the moral centre of the family, whose primary responsibility was imparting the values, qualities and characteristics that would make Canada’s future leaders men of strong moral stamina. This motherly role was extended to include their influence and impact on the tone of political life. It was routinely

argued that women's influence and effect on politics would be to purify public life through their election of men of strong character and values. In this sense, women's political function was to chasten political power, to upbraid men for their indulgences and to ensure that they executed their public duties with integrity and honesty. Women's political role, then, was conceptualized as a form of moral influence, and the central concern for Council members was whether this influence should be directly represented through their votes, or indirectly represented through their extra-political work in social and moral reform.

Nevertheless, for the women in Council, suffrage was an issue of secondary importance when compared to the more pressing concerns of immigration, domestic service, poverty, violence, and alcoholism. Indeed, it is in comparison with these other social concerns, that suffrage was constructed as a more moderate and reasonable measure. But, despite this secondary importance, the suffrage debates are significant for their concern with the role and influence of women in Canadian society. It is through the confluence of these various concerns, and women's varying roles, that their political subjectivity is transcendent. Women's influence would be for the benefit of all humanity, for the elevation of the Canadian nation, and for the furtherance of the "Christ principle" throughout the world. While the suffrage question raised a number of divergent and sometimes conflicting perspectives, the debates within Council were central to constructing the issue as fundamentally important to the continuing influence and stability of the Canadian nation.

**Chapter Five**  
**“A Higher Type of Womanhood”**  
**Gender, Domestic Science and the Education of Canadian Women**

---

The greatest world surprise of the last decade has been the defeat of Russia by Japan. We find the key to the situation in the statement that many Japanese mothers committed suicide when they found that their children were physically unfit to enter the Japanese Army. We may doubt the sanity of their action, but there can be no doubt but that any people whose motherhood are so inspired with the national spirit as to be willing to sacrifice their lives upon the altar of patriotism is bound quickly to take a frontier place conspicuous among the nations (Dr. S.B. Sinclair, NCWC, 1908: 97).

Addressing the National Council of Women immediately after the inaugural address by the Convener of the newly formed Committee on Education, Dr. S.B. Sinclair, former Principal of the Normal School in Ottawa, reminded the gathered women of their one true mission in life: the raising of morally and physically strong children. Admittedly focusing on an extreme example of maternal sacrifice, Sinclair nevertheless reiterated that, if Canada was to assume a “frontier place” in the world, Canadian women must be willing to sacrifice for their children. I begin with this rather hyperbolic anecdote to illustrate the emotions, the tensions and the conflicts which were engendered by the issue of women’s education. Sinclair delivered this address at the same time that the Council had decided to dissolve the Standing Committee on Domestic Science and Manual Training and replace it with the Committee on Education. This was a significant move on the part of the Council because it represented a movement beyond gender-specific forms of education – domestic science and manual training – in favour of a broader-based approach to various forms of education. Council discourses on women’s education attempted to create arenas, or spheres of

influence, within the educational system that would be receptive to women's participation. Originally concerned with establishing gender-specific education for Canadian women, Council members attenuated their rhetoric of separate spheres to endorse women's participation in educational institutions: as students, as teachers, and as board members. This participation, however, was carefully defined as an extension of women's responsibilities in the home.

The Council offered a wide ranging discussion of the issues relating to women's education in Canadian society. Discussing issues ranging from domestic science, moral instruction, university education and women on school boards, the educational discourses in Council were fundamentally concerned with defining the parameters of woman's sphere. Unlike discussions on suffrage, which sought to *negotiate* a role for women in a male-defined public sphere, educational discourses were fundamentally concerned with the creation of a gender-specific education to prepare women for their inevitable future roles. The issues articulated in these debates revolved around the necessity of education for women – from access to higher education to specific forms of technical education in public schools. Providing women and girls with an education to prepare them for their future roles was a paramount concern and enabled discussion about changing social conditions, women's changing status, and their concomitant responsibilities.

Within Council discourses on these issues, education is understood as one sphere of influence for Canadian women. Council, through its support of domestic science and gender-specific education, sought to create a public sphere for Canadian women. Council members created a discursive and physical

space where middle-class, white women were able to create a role for themselves in public affairs. However, Council discourses maintained and reinforced the gendered divisions of these spheres: the “political” public sphere remained resolutely male-dominated and Council made no attempt to infringe on that sphere. Rather, the Council created an alternative public sphere for Canadian women which sought to elevate the status of the home and woman’s place therein. Focusing on those issues which could facilitate women’s involvement in political or public affairs, Council was fundamentally concerned to provide for the expression of women’s perspectives on issues relating to women, to the home, and to children. As more women began entering the ranks of paid employment and institutions of higher education, the issues of domestic science and education for women became central concerns for Council members.

While some scholars have argued that domestic science education was a thinly disguised attempt to “contain” women within the home (Ehrenreich and English, 1978), others contend that the domestic science movement was also an important acknowledgment of women’s changing status (McKillop, 1994; Crowley, 1986; Snell, 2003). Thus, similar to discourses surrounding woman suffrage, domestic science discourses are contradictory to the extent that they straddle the debates regarding women’s place in Canadian society. Domestic science discourses were fundamentally concerned with issues relating to education for women and were inevitably bound up with discussions of women’s responsibilities to themselves, their families, and the nation. As such, Council discourses on domestic science help to bring into relief the issues and concerns

that characterized the “woman question” at the turn of the twentieth century in Canada.

### **Women, Education and Generalized Forms of Communication**

As with Council discussions on pernicious literature and woman suffrage, women’s identities as wives and mothers function as generalized forms of communication that define and limit their social and political roles to those that most directly affect children and the family unit. Habermas (1987) has described generalized forms of communication as features of a discourse that forestall disagreement and enable conversation to continue. Rooted in qualities such as prestige and influence, generalized forms of communication create a “general willingness to accept” a speaker’s statement based on the speaker’s expertise, technical knowledge, or intellectual capabilities (1987: 181). For Habermas, generalized forms of communication are different from the media of money and power in the sense that they depend on the consensual recognition of the speaker’s expertise. Expanding on Habermas’s discussion, Cohen (1995) contends that gender is a generalized form of communication which functions to block any critical interrogation of our supposedly natural gender identities. For Cohen, power operates through gendered codes that construct women’s identities as wives and mothers as natural, inevitable and “unchallengeable” (70).

In this dissertation, I have argued that the rhetoric of motherhood articulated through various Council debates should be understood as a generalized form of communication. Women’s maternal identities were consistently invoked to justify their participation in Canadian public life, but these

discourses also constructed that role as separate from, and ancillary to, the roles embodied by Canadian men. Council discourses on domestic science and education for women also reveal that generalized forms of communication are not simply structures or conventions designed to silence opposition. Rather, they enable a degree of debate and discussion, yet focus and shape that discussion according to deep-seated beliefs about women's place in the nation, the state, the family, the school and the home.

### **The Significance of Women's Education**

Educational discourses in Council were shaped by three central social and political concerns: the transformation of public and private spheres, changes in education, and the rise of the "new woman." For Snell (2003), domestic science emerged as an attempt by middle-class women to arrest, limit or control the path of social change, to reassert the primacy of the family and the mother's role therein, and to construct women's maternal and familial role as nationally significant. The overwhelming concern for Council members and other social reformers was the attempt to create a role for women in Canadian society and public life that did not undermine, subvert or challenge the status quo. An undercurrent in these debates was the belief that the movement of women into "male" spheres represented a significant threat to the stability of the social and political order. Domestic science discourses and discussions on women's education acknowledged the changing role of women in society, attempted to broaden "woman's" sphere, yet reasserted the primarily private and domestic aspects of that sphere.

In Council discussions on domestic science and women's education, the home was presented as woman's natural and unquestioned domain, yet, at the same time, there was the acknowledgment that at least some women were not "naturally" qualified to undertake these tasks. Specifically acknowledging that working class women would most benefit from domestic science training, Council discourses were predicated on a series of distinctions: between public and private spheres, between the responsibilities of men and women, between those women leading the movement and those presumably subject to its reforms. In this sense, it is possible to argue, as Strong-Boag does, that Council supported domestic science education for wage-earning girls because they wanted the benefit of properly trained domestic servants. For Strong-Boag (1976), the middle-class status of the majority of Council members allowed them a degree of freedom from the domain of the domestic sphere. She states emphatically that it was only through the substitution of working-class women in the home that Council women were able to assume roles of public influence and visibility (212).

Pedersen (1983) argues that urban and industrial changes in Canadian society had a catastrophic impact on the profession of domestic service, most notably through the "tendency of modern young working-class women to abandon their traditional employment in domestic service in favour of positions in factories and stores" (183). This social change produced an increasing interest in the cause of domestic science by middle-class women, who were interested in obtaining skilled labour in their homes. However, Danylewycz (1991) argues that the forces at play in the domestic science and educational movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were more extensive than the imposition

of a specific form of class rule. She contends that a specifically class-based analysis, while relevant, fails to take account of the widespread adoption of domestic science training throughout the educational system in Ontario, which was the centre of the domestic science movement (141).

In the discussion of domestic science teaching and training as well as discussions on the proper education for Canadian women and girls, there was the prevailing concern over the roles and responsibilities of Canadian women to their families and the nation. Believing that the home was the central unit of the nation and that women were therefore a key element in national life, educational discourses stressed that home-making skills were necessary for Canadian women of all socio-economic classes.

### **The Movement to Establish Domestic Science Training in Canada**

In his brief introduction to the domestic science movement in Canada, Snell (2003) argues that during the late 1890s, education was seen as a primary vehicle to address many pressing social concerns. He argues that domestic science had a broad-based appeal in Canada for three central reasons. First of all, domestic science reinforced the traditional, hierarchical structure of the nuclear family and demonstrated that “‘modern’ women were *not* out to change the world, but simply to improve it and that within their own ‘sphere’” (17). Secondly, domestic science provided a “safe” avenue for some women to expand their reach beyond the domestic sphere into the “professionalized” sphere of domestic science education. While domestic science adhered to traditional gendered notions of women’s work, it provided some women with an

opportunity to become acknowledged experts in the field (17). Lastly, domestic science was able to gain widespread support because it “employed credibly the rhetoric of home and family so near and dear to the hearts and minds of vast numbers of North Americans as part of the traditional strengths to be preserved” (17).

The domestic science movement emerged at a time of social change and, for scholars like Snell and McKillop (1994), it is seen as an attempt to control these changes, to reassert the stability of the family, and to reinforce women’s primary roles as wives and mothers. As McKillop states:

To the extent that such maternal feminists sought to enlarge the boundaries of woman's sphere, they did so in order to counter those forces within urban and industrial society that were seen to be eroding the stability of the traditional family (139).

The domestic science movement acknowledged women’s desires to escape from the confines of the domestic sphere (Bird, 1998), to enter into the professions, and to hold a degree of scientific authority (Pedersen, 1983; Saidak, 1986), all the while maintaining the gendered separation of spheres, and creating a specific curriculum for Canadian women and girls.

The domestic science movement in Canada was part of a larger international movement that saw the emergence of practical education and technical training for boys and girls (Snell, 2003; Bird, 1998; Reiger, 1987; Weigley, 1974; Riley, 1986). Within the Canadian context, domestic science became an issue of concern largely due to the efforts of one woman: Adelaide Hoodless. A central force behind the formation of the National Council of Women of Canada, and active in organizations such as the YWCA, Hoodless was a

tireless campaigner for practical education in Canadian schools. According to Crowley (1986) Hoodless's personal views of women's place in Canadian society were an inextricable element of her support of domestic science training for women and girls. He asserts that she was a traditionally-minded woman who feared the rise of the "new woman" and the presumed erosion of the family unit. In her addresses to the National Council, Hoodless asserted that the home was the central unit of the nation, and that woman's role in the family was a harbinger of national greatness or national ruin. Making a connection between domestic science and nation-building, Hoodless created an important role for the National Council. In 1898, she stated: "Some influence must lead the way, and can there be a more noble mission for the National Council of Women than to lay the foundation of a higher ideal of home life?" (NCWC, 1898: 260). It was through the Annual Meetings and Conventions of the National Council that Hoodless was able to generate support for domestic science training, and it was through Council debates on the function of women's education that such education became linked to women's inevitable and eventual roles as wives and mothers.

Council's position within the domestic science movement was one of moral support and influence, as opposed to one of active lobbying, however. Two other women's organizations were central to the life of the domestic science movement: the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and the Women's Institutes (Pedersen, 1983). Hoodless was an active member of each of these organizations and was pivotal in establishing the first school for domestic science at the YWCA in Hamilton, Ontario. In addition to these institutions, the contributions of various philanthropists were also essential in establishing

schools of domestic science in Ontario, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Lord Strathcona was a significant financial contributor to the Ontario Normal School of Domestic Science and Art, which was the first school established, in 1900, to train domestic science teachers (Pedersen, 1983: 191-92; NCWC, 1908: 83).

Sir William Macdonald, a tobacco magnate based in Montreal, was a significant philanthropic force behind the establishment of domestic science schools in Ontario, Quebec, and some maritime Provinces. In 1903, the Macdonald Institute and Hall was established in Guelph, Ontario, originally under the auspices of the Ontario Agricultural College (Pedersen, 1983). The Macdonald Institute was committed to training domestic science teachers and was specifically concerned to make home-making courses available to farm women (Pedersen, 1983: 192; NCWC, 1908: 83). Macdonald also established a domestic science college in Ste. Anne de Bellevue, Quebec, and Consolidated Schools in New Brunswick (NCWC, 1908: 84).

Lillian Massey-Treble, through the encouragement of Hoodless, established the Lillian Massey Normal Training School in Toronto in 1897 (Pedersen, 1983: 191). In 1905, Massey-Treble contributed \$80,000 to the establishment of a School of Home Economics at the University of Toronto (Pedersen 1983: 192; NCWC, 1908: 83).

Identified as an issue worthy of consideration by Council members as early as its first Annual Meeting in 1894, domestic science had been well-established in the Ontario school system by 1908, to such an extent that the subject was represented in every level of the educational system (Pedersen

1983: 192; NCWC, 1908: 84). Council records indicate that the domestic science movement was concentrated in Ontario, with some courses offered in the maritime provinces. The Truro Normal School in Nova Scotia provided domestic science training, and by 1908, schools in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island were offering courses in household science and domestic training, after the offer of government grants, and the establishment of Macdonald Consolidated Schools (NCWC, 1908: 84). Indeed, it was only through the co-operation of women's organizations, private philanthropists, and government that a domestic science curriculum was established in these provinces.

British sociologists Turnbull (1994) and Bird (1998) have argued that the tensions between women's public and private roles were illustrated in two social movements: the women's movement and the domestic science movement. Through an analysis of these two movements we can begin to understand the contradictions, tensions and fears that greeted women's "widening sphere." But the domestic science and educational reform movements in Canada did not exist in opposition to the organized women's movement, the demand for suffrage, or the temperance movement. Rather, Canadian women active in social reform, suffrage, temperance and educational reform often linked these issues in a larger concern for the legacy of the Canadian nation. These various discourses illustrate the extent to which the "woman question" was a complex set of issues not limited to women's quest for political representation, higher education or an enlarged sphere. These were some of the central issues that preoccupied the women active in the National Council, but it is important to stress that they are not mutually exclusive. Through an analysis of the Council debates on domestic

science and women's education, we can determine how these middle-class, white women were able to secure a role for themselves as the leaders of a new movement. The domestic science movement sought to secure suitable employment for middle-class young women as teachers, offer training in housework for working class women, and participate in a wide ranging discussion of women's various roles and responsibilities in Canadian society.

### **Deficient Motherhood and the Education of Girls**

The interest in providing gender specific technical education in Canadian schools arose during the latter part of the nineteenth century in Canada, as well as in the United States, Australia, and Great Britain. Specifically linked to the health and welfare of the Canadian nation, domestic science was endorsed by Council members as the best means of ensuring national greatness. Harriet Boomer, a Council member from London, Ontario, gave a brief summary of the interest in "definite training" for Canadian girls and stated:

There is now a wider recognition given to the necessity for adapting the subject taught not only to the age and capacity, but also to the sex of the pupil; that the school curriculum should recognize all sides of the educational requirements of the child, and that while aiming at 'giving the world more complete, all-round, harmonious boys,' it should aim at giving it also, the complete, all-round, harmonious girls, the womanly women who will become the wives of many of those boys, and the home makers and home keepers of our land (NCWC, 1900: 62).

So, first and foremost, a central impetus behind domestic science training was to ensure a specific – and specialized – education for Canadian girls. Council discussions on education and domestic science continually stressed the import and necessity of providing a useful education for Canadian girls. For various

educational reformers, it was imperative that the educational system be responsive to the specific needs of female students. But specifically for Council members, it was essential that women should have a role in the reform process. Indeed, for Hoodless, it was only through women's participation that any progress had been made on the education of girls.

One point which I have observed in reading reports of manual training schools and books written on the subject is – that the method of such instruction has been clearly defined for boys; but only when capable energetic women have come to the rescue has there been anything definite done for girls (NCWC, 1894: 116).

The rationale behind the provision of domestic science training for Canadian girls was to make up for a perceived lack of instruction in the vital areas of keeping and maintaining a home. For the proponents of domestic science instruction, the educational system, largely organized and administered by men, had seriously neglected the needs of female students. While boys were prepared to assume roles in the public sphere and as the bread winning, male heads of households, Council members collectively asked: "What corresponding effort is made to train a girl for her duties in life?" (NCWC, 1900: 85). For too long, educators had made the mistake of "educating our girls as if they were all going to be ladies of leisure" (NCWC, 1900: 197), and such an approach was woefully inadequate for the contemporary conditions in which many women would find themselves.

Her natural lot is to be a wife and mother, and yet this fact is seldom taken into consideration in educating her, is indeed kept out of sight as if it were something to be ashamed of and has little or no influence in determining what she shall learn (NCWC, 1900: 85).

This acknowledgment that many young women were ill-prepared to assume home-making and home-keeping responsibilities pointed to a significant shift in the lives, and the attitudes, of Canadian women. It certainly suggested that Canadian mothers were over-worked to such an extent that they did not have the time, or possibly the inclination, to also bear the responsibility of educating their young children. For Council members, however, a general assumption was that part and parcel of a mother's responsibilities was to take on the preliminary education of her children. Discourses on domestic science and educational reform illustrate the extent to which this assumption was increasingly open to challenge.

During a Council discussion on the presence of children on the streets and the mother's responsibilities in educating her children, a sympathetic note was sounded by one speaker, Miss Bowes from Victoria. Acknowledging the amount of work facing women within the home, and the difficulty of supervising children, she suggested the formation of a kindergarten which might provide some respite for "tired mothers, – who have enough to do to struggle with the bread and butter question, and have no time to teach their children to sew" (NCWC, 1900: 72-3). She continued, "The point might be raised that mothers should teach geography, reading and grammar; many of the mothers are quite capable of doing so, but want of time would not permit them" (NCWC, 1900: 73). However, this sympathetic suggestion was immediately greeted with the anonymous retort: "Then they should not have children" (NCWC, 1900: 73). Recognizing that many women did not have the opportunity, the time, or more importantly, the ability to

educate their children, various Council members and educators outlined the necessity of offering such instruction in public schools.

While the movement to adopt domestic science training in Canadian schools was widely supported by Council members, there was a continuing concern that such a move would undercut the influence of the home in a child's life. Agnes Deans Cameron, an educator and suffragist from Victoria, offers a challenge to traditional Council wisdom that saw domestic science instruction as an incalculable benefit. Lamenting that education had been over-ridden with social reformers, she commented:

Sewing guilds and Delsarte [calisthenics] demonstrators clamor for the chance to enrich our programmes, while piping in between them is heard the siren voice of the tonic sol-fa-ist. You can't open your school room door for a breath of fresh air without having some one with a mission fall in (NCWC, 1900: 94).

Concerned that the introduction of additional subjects, invariably linked to social reform causes, would crowd out the "ground-work subjects," Deans suggested a remedy: "Lop off the enrichments ... and get back to simpler conditions" (NCWC, 1900: 95). But more to the point for Deans was that educational reform had gone too far and removed the central role of moral influence and instruction from the home to the classroom.

Again, in throwing the whole work of teaching on the school, I feel that there is danger of depriving the home of its legitimate influence. Children of this generation are losing a something that nothing else in this world can supply. Their busy, overcrowded school lives are robbing them of the direct mother-influence which belonged to us of the last generation of children (NCWC, 1900: 96).

Agreeing with the majority of Council members that the family “forms the unit of national greatness,” Deans nonetheless urged women to be cautious in their support for this sort of educational reform.

Don't be too eager to pass your little one on to the nation's nurseries, the kindergarten and the primary school. Your child will in his school journey have many teachers and they will, some more and some less, influence his life, but he has and can have but one mother (NCWC, 1900: 96).

While Deans's discussion indicates that domestic science education encountered some resistance, even within the Council, it is significant that her criticisms still rely on an understanding of the moral responsibilities of the nation's mothers. Perhaps because her remarks did not seek to challenge woman's position in the home, her criticisms of social reformers were palatable to an audience that could otherwise take grave offence. Deans even acknowledged this possibility in her talk. Reflecting on the lack of popularity of her opinions at previous Council meetings, she stated: “Now, well do I know that I will be called an obstructionist. I see it coming by more than one determined eye in front of me” (NCWC, 1900: 95). But for Deans the more important task at hand was to ensure that the role and influence of the mother within the home should not be abrogated by the introduction of social reform subjects in the schools.

For Adelaide Hoodless, however, domestic science teaching and training offered a way to offset the detrimental effects of urban and industrial change. In a detailed discussion on the value of domestic science, she outlined the perceived negative effects of commercialism upon the home.

In no phase of life has the commercial spirit played greater havoc than in that of the Home ... Instead of finding the chief pleasures and duties of life in the Home circle, our young women seek a

career in the world of commerce or elsewhere (NCWC, 1902: 118).

Women's "voluntary" abandonment of her domestic role presented grave risk to the nation. National stability depended upon familial stability since the family itself was "the unit of society" (NCWC, 1902: 118). Lamenting the loss of a way of life in which women and men had clearly defined private and public roles, Hoodless suggested that urban and industrial change had robbed women of an important social position. "When the home was the centre of manufacturing interests," she stated, "we did not hear anything ... about a 'career;' life was full, satisfying, and women were an important factor in social concerns" (NCWC, 1902: 118). These changing social conditions meant that it was no longer likely that young women would receive domestic instruction at their mothers' side. Instead, Hoodless asserted, such instruction must be provided through the education system.

Responding to criticisms that domestic science training should be provided in the home by mothers, Hoodless suggested that changing social conditions had made this informal instruction virtually impossible.

The good men on School Boards who delight in telling us of their Mothers' ability to manage a home without special training forget that the very training we are asking for now was provided for their mothers under former conditions (NCWC, 1902: 118).

But more to the point for Hoodless, such instruction was a matter of national concern:

unless something is done to counteract the commercial spirit developing so rapidly in our midst, we may well feel grave apprehension concerning the mothers of the future and their offspring. As a river cannot rise above its source, neither can a nation rise above its home life (NCWC, 1902: 118).

The loss of a clear, gendered distinction between public and private spheres, and the concomitant responsibilities of men and women portends poorly for the future of the nation. Hence, for Hoodless, incorporating domestic science instruction into a girl's education was an important way to reassert the primacy of the home in a young woman's life.

### **Women's Place in the Nation: Making the Home a National Mission**

Throughout Council discussions on domestic science and education, a clear link was made between women's position in the home and a larger project of nation-building. For Hoodless, especially, but also for educators such as Agnes Deans Cameron, Carrie Derick and Eliza Ritchie, women's domestic responsibilities were of paramount importance. However, what is significant about the discussions on these responsibilities is that they were also used as a justification for women's entrance into higher education, and into the profession of teaching. Centrally concerned to place the home on the national agenda, women active in the National Council asserted that the home was the cornerstone of the nation, and that issues affecting women and the home were worthy of political attention and consideration. For Hoodless, mothers were central in the development of the nation because it was from them that male children inherited character, integrity, respect and other noble traits. Given women's central role in character development, she asked, "is it not necessary that women's education should be such as to fit her for the better fulfilment of those responsibilities?" (NCWC, 1894: 114).

Ensuring that women were well-educated enough to understand the principles of the kindergarten, and to ensure that their own children were being educated properly, was a central justification for women's education. Drawing on the arguments of various educators, Hoodless asserted that the nation itself depended upon the moulding of ideal women through educational reform:

Colonel Clarke, an authority on industrial education, says, 'Woman, as the mother in all her beneficent relations, is the highest ideal of humanity. Upon her wisdom, industry, economy, supervision and executive direction, the character, the happiness and the prosperity of the family depend.' What an enormous responsibility, and how few realize it. If large classes of girls are allowed to grow up to womanhood without an opportunity to acquire the knowledge and habits requisite for the successful performance of those duties it is inevitable that humanity must suffer. The economic management of society rests to a very large extent on the women (NCWC, 1894: 115).

This view was supported by other Council members who asserted that

the home is but a microcosm of the State, and there is needed for both, the womanly touch, the wise ordering, the endurance, wisdom, foresight, skill, which will do much towards carrying out, very practically, the working motto of our Society, which is to apply the Golden Rule, 'Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you,' to society, custom and law (NCWC, 1896: 388).

It was through women's distinct abilities that the nation would rise to greatness, and this meant that all women had a responsibility not only to themselves, but to their families, and by extent, the nation. These responsibilities necessitated that women's education must not be intended solely for self-culture, intellectual inquiry or self-development. For many Council women, the emergence of women into institutions of higher education posed a great threat to the stability of the family. If this education did not seek to prepare women for their inevitable roles as wives and mothers, the result was not only failed womanhood, but national failure as well. Indeed, the figure of the woman who went to college or university

for personal challenge or fulfillment was an alien concept to Council members, one of whom confesses,

I must own that I have little patience with the woman who studies political economy at college but treats her family to sour bread and fried beefsteak. There is something decidedly wrong with her moral perceptions, and you may depend upon it, that if such a course is not speedily stopped, not only will the family and household suffer from indigestion, but the whole tone of the community will be perceptibly lowered (NCWC, 1896: 388).

Council members were clearly aware that women's status in society was changing, and while some members feared these changes, others took the opportunity to suggest various ways that women could make a positive contribution to national life. For the majority of Council members, this positive contribution was rooted in women's position within the home. It was through the perfection of her role as wife and mother that woman would ensure a lasting legacy: the raising of strong, noble sons who would bring integrity and character to public life, and daughters who would understand the value of home-making. But in order for women to make this significant contribution, they had to understand the value of the home and their role in it. For Council members, the figure of the mother was that of the 'angel in the house,' charged with the weighty responsibility of instilling values and character within her children. It was through this maternal role that women would be able to make their most significant contribution.

But for Hoodless, women had fallen far short of the mark. Forsaking their maternal responsibilities, women had entered the working professions and the end result was a public life of corruption, disrepute and scandal. She stated,

When we hear bitter denunciations of political, municipal and other leaders, do we ever think that these men were once children; that

their mind and character was in the hand of some woman to mould? If that early influence was one of social frivolity, sham religion, and domestic infelicity, can we expect anything very strong and upright from such a source? Upon the mother 'who is a divinity' to her growing boy, and upon her early influence, must rest the foundation of her boy's character (NCWC, 1898: 256).

Hoodless asserted that women were failing in their mission, allowing domestic life to become silly, frivolous and insignificant. Women must strive to embody perfection and provide a strong role model, especially for their sons, who were destined to become the future leaders of the nation. Within these discourses, it was a mother's responsibilities to her sons that remained significant. While domestic science was ultimately concerned with the education of young women and girls, such education was intended to prepare them for their roles within the home, not within the public sphere. A woman's contribution, then, was to embody the ideal of womanhood and to instill in her sons a deep respect for women and an appreciation of their contributions to society.

Is such mental pabulum as discussions on dress, amusements, gossip, servants, the latest novels and opera, likely to send a boy or man out into the world with a high ideal of woman's moral and mental power, or lead him to consider her as a factor in national life? If we are to have good politicians, and true, honest men, we must have a higher type of womanhood (NCWC, 1898: 256).

Her responsibilities to her daughters, while not specifically stated in Council discussions, was to provide the strong role model of the ideal mother, a representative of the higher type of womanhood that daughters would inevitably also seek to embody.

So, early on in Council discussions of domestic science and education for women, the prevailing concern was to reassert the primacy of the family as women's primary domain. The perfection of her roles as wife and mother would

contribute to the development of strong and faithful citizens and a vibrant nation. A woman's primary responsibility was to ensure that her children received an education tailored to prepare them for their future roles. While these discourses were centrally concerned to ensure that the home maintained its place as the "unit of society," there was also considerable discussion on women's rights to education, their desire to enter into institutions of learning, and what form the education of women should take.

### **Education for Women or Education for Mothers? Education and the Rhetoric of Separate Spheres**

Throughout the Council's discussions on domestic science and education for women, there is a strong tension between the public and the private. In this sense, discourses on domestic science articulated within Council sought to address women's desires for higher education, and for a life outside the domestic sphere, while also serving as a check on women's progress and emancipation. The end result of such discourses was that, while women were entitled to higher education, they must not neglect their responsibilities to home and family. That domestic science training could function as an effective brake on women's entrance into higher education was suggested by Hoodless, who, in a speech in 1896, stated "there has been a strong tendency apparent to us of the pendulum swinging a little too far towards the side of higher education. In order to check this before it could get too far, we have taken up this question" (NCWC, 1896: 382).

For Hoodless specifically, women's entrance into male defined fields of paid work was evidence of their "emancipation," but not of their "progress." In

order for women to truly progress in society, they must master and perfect their role within the home.

Woman has had, from creation, distinctly defined duties, and until the power of education and influence is brought to bear upon these duties, and she has demonstrated her ability to do her own work well, she has no right to infringe on man's prerogative (NCWC, 1898: 257).

While women's entrance into higher education certainly reflected a change in her social status, Council members were concerned that such education would ultimately be detrimental and "may require to have its wings clipped" (NCWC, 1898: 261).

Council members acknowledged women's demands for higher education and, in fact, supported the education of women. But Council discussions on education and domestic science constructed women's education along gender-specific lines. In addition to providing instruction on history, geography and other subjects, a woman's education should also seek to prepare them for their likely role as wife, mother, and home-maker. Hoodless stated, "That women should receive every educational privilege accorded to men is generally conceded, but does it follow that it should be the *same kind* of education?" (NCWC, 1898: 261). Council discourses suggested that educating women and men along the same lines neglected consideration of the fact that women had specific responsibilities and duties in the home. A central danger in gender-neutral education was the possibility that it would make women self-centred, self-absorbed and "indifferent to the claims of others". As Hoodless acknowledged:

The close attention to study which is necessary for many years has a tendency to develop selfishness ... No amount of intellectuality can compensate for the absence of that loving and

unselfish consideration of others, which is woman's greatest charm (NCWC, 1898: 261).

Hence, a central concern over the education of women was that it would potentially rob her of the feminine qualities and characteristics that comprise the "higher type of womanhood."

That women were entitled to higher education was not challenged by Council members, perhaps because they had realized that such progress was inevitable. Instead, Council set itself the task of ensuring that educators, parents, and women themselves understood that women and young girls required a specific form of education "that will fit them for the better performance of their work in life" (NCWC, 1900: 88). Such education would be beneficial to all women: middle and working class, single and married, for ultimately, it would prepare them to make a useful contribution to Canadian social life. As Elizabeth Scovil, correspondent for the *Ladies' Home Journal* and Council member from New Brunswick, stated:

If they never marry, their training will not be thrown away. There are always helpless children to be cared for, girls to teach, weak sisters to be helped. Many a single woman makes a home of her own and is happy in it. If she knows how to do it, she can make it a training place for others, a centre of helpfulness that may spread blessings around it. If she marries, she will be the better able to raise up strong sons and useful daughters and to do her husband 'good and not evil all the days of his life' (NCWC, 1900: 88).

Thus, a well-educated woman who runs an efficient home is a boon to her family, her community, and the nation as a whole. It was through these discourses that well-educated women were given an important role in Canadian society, but it was a role that revolved around their appearance as shining examples of virtuous womanhood. Indeed, through her effectiveness as a housekeeper and

home-maker, woman, whether single or married, was an influential and instructive model to others who invariably fell short of the mark.

Centrally concerned with the role of education in the lives of Canadian mothers, Council discourses on the education of women confronted the suggestions that too much education would cost a woman her femininity. In early Council discussions on domestic science and education for women, there was the general and pervasive concern that the promise of higher education would lure women from the home, resulting in neglected families. Given these fears, the central task for women in Council was to define education for women in such a way that it would contribute to and encourage their acceptance of their domestic responsibilities. In this sense, then, women's education became an important factor in family stability and happiness.

University women are much better prepared for bringing up a family of boys and girls; the university woman is more companionable to her husband, and there will not be so many unhappy families if the wives and mothers are companionable to their husbands and boys, and it does not take away from her sacredness or womanliness of home life if she can converse with them on current subjects of the day (NCWC, 1898: 270).

An education that fits Canadian women to perfect their roles as wives and mothers would in no way subvert their femininity, their womanly mission, or their position within the domestic sphere. An educated woman was an important influence, especially for the men in her family. Her education and her ability to speak to general issues and subjects elevated her in the esteem of her husband and male children.

We do not always command the respect of the men of our country in the political world. We should command their respect much more if we were educated to express our own mind and able to

set forth in a clear manner just what we want to convince them of (NCWC, 1898: 270).

In this sense, women's education was also part and parcel of women's emergence into public life, a movement of which Council is one important institution. But it is significant that this public role is constructed as a relatively passive one: educated mothers are not encouraged to stand for public office, to voice their concerns to elected officials, or to take to the streets in protest of social conditions, educational reform, or women's rights. Rather, her role is one of personal influence and moral suasion: a woman who has the attention, and respect of her husband and male children does an enormous amount of good in the mere elevation of women in men's esteem.

Perhaps the best example of the connection between women's emancipation and women's education was provided through Augusta Stowe-Gullen. Daughter of Emily Howard Stowe, an early suffragist and the first Canadian female doctor, Augusta Stowe-Gullen was, admittedly, "born ... to fight on the 'woman question'" (NCWC, 1898: 267). One of the first women to obtain her medical degree at a Canadian university, Stowe-Gullen was, unsurprisingly, a wholehearted advocate of women's access to higher education. Sounding a note of dissent within Council ranks, she suggested that a central problem with the project undertaken by Hoodless was that it would deprive women of opportunities (NCWC, 1898: 267). Arguing that "woman's sphere is that in which she can do her best in the interests of humanity", Stowe-Gullen asserted that attempts to deprive women of educational opportunities were designed to keep them in a state of oppression.

It has been woman's high privilege to work as a slave, and people do not say that was outside of woman's sphere, but when women begin to invade man's sphere then we hear about woman's sphere ... We have been told that we have been 'killed,' so we have, opportunities have been killed, educationally we have been killed (NCWC, 1898: 267).

Stowe-Gullen acknowledged that the home remained woman's sphere, and furthered her assertion by maintaining that it was man's sphere as well. But perhaps most important in Stowe-Gullen's remarks was the link she made between women's education and organizations such as the National Council. At the conclusion of her speech she stated:

Now if it had not been for this struggle along these lines, along the educational lines, the National Council of Women would never have existed to-day ... And so, as a result, little by little this movement has evolved until to-day we have organizations of women all over the world, of women who are learning to think (NCWC, 1898: 268).

Hence, this commitment to the education of Canadian women also benefits the Council itself. Indeed, if Council was to continue to make an informed and practical intervention in public life, it required the continued participation of educated and public-spirited women and mothers.

### **Domestic Science and Social Reform**

While Council discourses did focus on the ways that educated mothers could be an important force within the family, Council members acknowledged that an educated woman's influence could expand beyond the confines of the home. At the second Annual Meeting of the National Council, a clear connection was made between domestic science training and social reform. This early focus on education and reform may be explained as an attempt to "fit" the issue of

women's education into the Council's social reform agenda. However, it was through this link to social reform that women's positive influence within the home was invested with national significance. Indeed, for Council members and other reformers, an educated woman within the home was more than just a knowledgeable companion for her husband and an efficient care-taker of her children. She was also a force of good in the world.

There is no one who can have more influence for good than an educated mother. Great indeed is the responsibility that rests with her. If only all mothers would realize it more, their [sic] would be far less thought for showy accomplishments, worldly advancement, and the love of fine dress, which is so often instilled quite early in life; but instead a girl would be brought up to feel that life was a gift from God and that all the advantage which education gives, not only brings to its possessor the means of living a higher and more beautiful life herself, but also opens up unbounded possibilities for doing good, and so often bringing joy and pleasure into many otherwise darkened lives (NCWC, 1895: 101).

Thus, the education of women also informed larger concerns of moral regulation, character development and social reform. An educated mother would undoubtedly raise socially conscious sons and daughters, ready and willing to address various social problems characterizing Canadian society.

In this beautiful world of ours there is much suffering, sorrow and sin, and we are needing more workers in those 'fields which are white already to harvest' – these children of educated mothers – an army of noble workers to follow in the footsteps of the gentle Saviour, each one making it his or her aim in life to do something, no matter how small, to comfort, help and elevate the suffering, poor and tempted, and thus themselves draw nearer to the 'Perfect Life' (NCWC, 1895: 102).

Once the home was recognized and accepted as woman's central mission, once women perfected their roles within the home, it would become a guiding force of moral goodness in the world.

This belief was also reflected in the early links made between domestic science training and temperance. In the Council's early discussions on the necessity of domestic science, the working classes were constructed as those most in need of such instruction and training. In a speech discussing the relation between food, recreation and intemperance, Harriet Olive from St. John, New Brunswick, outlined the class dimensions of domestic science instruction:

It is not necessary to prove to you that the women to whom such knowledge is most important – the women of the poorer classes – are most ignorant and most careless of it. Girls of the prosperous, thrifty, middle classes, who live at home are, as a rule, well trained in the art of housekeeping, have at least a practical, if not a scientific and theoretical, knowledge. But it is the girls who go to work in factories and shops as soon as they are old enough, and then, while too young for life's responsibilities, marry into still poorer homes, who grow up in absolute and appalling ignorance of what to buy and how to cook it (NCWC, 1895: 91).

The result of such domestic incompetence was the creation of a home that did not offer comfort and respite from the outside world. Given such conditions, Olive asked, "Is it any wonder that the husbands of these girls seek the public houses in escape from the untidiness and unattractiveness of their homes and to quiet the cravings caused by the utter lack of wholesome, well-cooked food?" (NCWC, 1895: 91). In this view, a key element in the prevention of immoral behaviour was the creation of a warm, welcoming, efficient home, with the well-educated and well-trained mother safely ensconced within. Women's responsibilities within the home, then, became elevated above the plebeian level of domestic tasks to a moral mission of self-constraint, self-policing and self-mastery. Through these various discussions of the benefits of domestic science training, Canadian women and mothers were given a mission above the sphere of official politics. Not limited to the reformatory efforts of women in the Christian Temperance

Union, the Canadian mother had a formative mission in the creation of future generations with a love of home and nation and a positive distaste of "everything that would enslave a man and make him less master of himself" (NCWC, 1895: 93).

For the proponents of domestic science training, the various social problems affecting Canadian society – intemperance, over-crowding, ill-health – could be addressed through scientific management of the home. Hoodless herself believed that "a more scientific knowledge of household management would make people healthier and happier" (NCWC, 1898: 255). But more to the point for Hoodless, domestic science training proposed a positive path of social and moral reform. While various social scientists, theologians and social reformers had identified existing social "evils," Hoodless complained that they had no success in postulating feasible and practical solutions to these problems. In an address in 1898, she lamented the lack of attention paid to the potential causes of these problems.

Our organized bodies of women have devoted time, money and brains to the provision of work for the poor, the housing of paupers, the prevention of intemperance, missionary work, the protection of women and children, shorter hours of labour; all good and necessary, but how much attention are these bodies of women giving to the actual prevention of the evils, the result of which they are working so hard to provide (NCWC, 1898: 258).

As previously stated, Hoodless located the source of these "evils" in the changing social conditions that led women from the home and into the workforce. Concerned that the loss of a clear distinction between male and female domains would spell certain disaster for the Canadian nation, domestic science supporters argued that a more scientific approach to home-making would benefit society as

a whole. Pedersen (1991) suggests that domestic science was presented as a potentially glamorous new career for the modern Canadian woman. The introduction of scientific principles into home-making lent an air of authority to the occupation. At the same time, it sought to encourage wage-earning women to re-enter the domestic service ranks and disseminated practical knowledge that would improve the moral tone of poorer homes and families. Indeed, in these early discussions, wage-earning women and working-class families emerged as the central beneficiaries of domestic science training. Additionally, it was these classes that were conveniently "blamed" for existing social problems. Working-class girls, for example,

have been allowed to grow up in utter ignorance of the most important household duties; and, in far too many instances, the painful results are bad cooking, poor washing, and shiftless, untidy housekeeping, with a great deal of discomfort and misery to husband, wife and children. I do not wonder that some men spend their evenings in the clubroom, the hotel, or the saloon; for the musty smell, the untidiness, and the filth of many places called homes are sufficient to drive the average man to desperation (NCWC, 1899/1900:197).

### **Education, Moral Regulation and Parental Responsibility**

The connection between education and moral regulation did not limit itself to the issue of domestic science alone. In 1898, the Council introduced a resolution on the necessity of the moral instruction of children. It was through these discourses that the issue of education was understood as an important aspect of nation-building, women's progress, and Council's position within Canadian society. Making a clear link between crime and the lack of moral training of the young, the resolution proposed that

the National Council should petition the Educational Authorities of the various provinces to make the moral training of the children in our Public Schools a subject of special attention, so that they may be early impressed with right principles of action, and have some idea of the ideas of good citizenship (NCWC, 1898: 314).

Through this resolution, the Council attempted to position itself as a morally instructive and influential organization, encouraging women to elevate the tone of Canadian society and make up for the deficiencies of other Canadians. Indeed, throughout the discussion of this resolution, which was dropped in favour of an amendment stressing co-operation between parents and teachers, Council positions itself as a moral arbiter, and as an organization able to use moral suasion to affect positive social change. Acknowledging that some (presumably wage-earning or working-class) parents were morally unfit to raise their children, Agnes Maule Machar suggests the vicious circle that poor parenting perpetuated:

We have a correspondingly large substratum in which the children from moral malnutrition inherit predisposition which needs special regulation from the parents. Are we to leave to the parents the correction of the vicious propensities which have been inherited from themselves? (NCWC, 1898: 316).

Again, it was through the Council that these issues were raised and certain solutions proposed. Council's influence on the school curriculum would give the teacher an increasing responsibility for the moral instruction of the nation's children. Perhaps unsurprisingly, some members reacted with skepticism to the suggestion that teachers should make up for parents' moral laxity.

Representatives from the Ottawa Local Council proposed an amendment that would replace the original resolution.

That as there is grave reason for fearing that the moral training of the youth of Canada is not receiving sufficient attention, and as the training of good citizens must begin in the homes and in the

**schools of the country, the National Council of Women of Canada pledges itself ... to strive to induce a greater sense of responsibility amongst parents and to bring about more co-operation between parents and teachers ... so that more stress may be laid on wise moral teaching and effort made to impress the duties of good citizenship on the youth of this Dominion (NCWC, 1898: 317).**

Fearing that the original resolution sought to absolve parents of their responsibility for the proper moral instruction of their children, the amendment gave Council, and its members, a mediating role between two important social institutions: the family and the school. Insisting that the home, the family and the school were the cornerstones of Canadian society, Council's role was to facilitate co-operation and discussion among these constituencies. Council's role in these various discourses and movements was justified through its ability to represent the informed opinion of Canadian women and mothers. By occupying this mediating role, Council was concerned not only with the health and welfare of Canadian children, but also with the moral health and well-being of Canadian families en masse.

### **Education and Women's Activism**

Through its discussions on issues such as domestic science training, the moral instruction of children and, later, the appointment of women to school boards, the National Council set out to establish education as an appropriate domain for women's activism and reform efforts. Since the welfare of the nation's children was in the hands of parents (generally mothers) and teachers, there was the acknowledgment that they are and must be "natural allies." In an address to the National Council in 1901, Mr. Little, President of the Teachers' Association and

Vice President of the Collegiate Institute in London, Ontario, outlined the connections between Council members and teachers.

We feel that your work, your aims, are more nearly allied to the work and aims of the teacher than those of any other body of workers in the state. We see in this National Council of Women one of the most potent factors for the mental and moral upbuilding of the youth of our land, which is the great charge committed to the teaching profession. You are our natural allies (NCWC, 1901: 103).

Women's participation in educational reform was a necessary step in order to provide a strong foundation for the nation's youth, and women's entrance into this area of reform was tacitly acknowledged as addressing an oversight on the part of male leaders. Women position themselves, and are positioned, as providing a viewpoint, a perspective and a set of qualities lacking in male-defined institutions and associations.

The active participation of woman in the field of moral and educational reform marks an epoch in the history of the race. Nothing has been clearer to any intelligent person during the last quarter of a century than the fact that the forces of moral reform were entirely inadequate to cover the field. The advent of woman, therefore, into the unoccupied territory needs no justification. In social and moral reform, as in every other department in modern life, the conditions of success demand the division of labour. Man alone is entirely incapable to meet the demands of legislation, restriction, investigation and authority in this field of work. Woman ought to have and must have her own sphere in which she is paramount (NCWC, 1901: 104).

That women should participate in public affairs was, by now, axiomatic. But, to paraphrase Hoodless, it did not follow that she should participate in the same way, or to the same extent, as men. Indeed, through these various discussions, education was defined as an arena that required the thoughtful and dedicated participation of Canadian women. But again, the role of women here was one of moral influence, counsel and guidance. Posited as "natural allies" of teachers

and educators, the women of the Council had an important role to play in the raising of public awareness and the garnering of public support for educational reforms and improvements. "In the working out of educational reforms, it is to you that the teachers, of whom now women form so large a proportion, will look for sympathy and help and guidance" (NCWC, 1901: 104-5).

### **Women on School Boards**

Through its support of various projects such as domestic science training, moral instruction in the schools and co-operation between parents and teachers, the National Council defined education as a natural arena for the active, thoughtful, and committed participation of Canadian women. This commitment also extended the Council's support of the appointment of women to school boards. While an issue such as woman suffrage was a fractious and potentially divisive one for the Council, the organization was seemingly unanimous in its support for women on school boards. Securing women representatives on school boards was originally justified through a gendered argument: the number of female teachers and female students necessitated female representatives at the board level. But additionally, Council members stressed woman's fitness for the work, her undoubted moral influence, and her rationality.

Proponents of women serving on school boards were, however, careful to assert that women should seek such positions only if they were qualified to hold them. While the issue was not as central as the discussions of domestic science, it occasionally received fairly extensive debate. In 1905, for example, Council members discussed the means by which women should be appointed to school

boards, and virtually every speaker addressed the necessity of such appointments. But what was additionally significant about Council's discussion was the extent to which the positions were invested with specifically "feminine" qualities such as self-sacrifice and moral influence. Speculating on the type of role female board members might occupy, Harriet Boomer from London, Ontario gave the example of women inspectors on school boards in London, England. First of all, she established that women would still be working within their accepted sphere since "special departments of work are usually allotted to them." These special assignments include "the supervision of the more domestic subjects, the oversight of arrangements for defective children, the introduction of flower culture, the beautifying of schoolrooms, and a more friendly and intimate oversight of the women teachers" (NCWC, 1905: 94).

The ability to perform these particular duties depended upon the selection of properly qualified women. Electing or appointing a woman on the basis of her gender alone was viewed by Council members as both regressive and insulting. For Carrie Derick, women's abilities and merits should determine their qualifications for such positions. Her endorsement of women on school boards was predicated on the assertion that they must be subject to the same electoral or appointment process as male candidates. She stated:

I can understand that it might be pleasant to secure the appointment of women to School Boards in some different way from that in which the men are chosen, for instance, through appointment rather than election. Let us, however, ask for no special privileges for women, but rise to the dignity of human beings; asking that our work be judged as the work of human beings and not as that of women. Then, if we cannot stand up on our merits let us fall (NCWC, 1905: 96).

Through this discussion of women on school boards, then, it is clear that some Council members (notably Carrie Derick and Eliza Ritchie) began to challenge the rhetoric of separate spheres and separate education to consider ways in which women might be more integrated into traditionally male-defined and male-dominated structures. This is perhaps a natural outgrowth of Council's earlier discussions on women's access to education: that women should have the same opportunities as men in education or as members of school boards. However, it is also a potentially significant break with the established Council wisdom that maintained clear distinctions between men and women, their roles, duties and responsibilities. That this discussion arises after domestic science has been widely adopted in Ontario schools suggests that women must continue to expand their reach and participate more fully and formally in educational structures. It is additionally significant that it was Carrie Derick and Eliza Ritchie who were the two principle speakers on this issue. Both women were prominent in the field of higher education: Derick was the first woman to become a university professor when McGill appointed her in 1912 (Collections Canada web site), and Ritchie is largely regarded as the first woman in Canada to receive a Ph.D., which was granted in 1889 from Cornell University (NSACSW web site). This stands in sharp contrast to the educational background of Adelaide Hoodless, the original proponent of domestic science education. She was the wife of a socially prominent business-man and political conservative who had very little formal education herself (Stamp, 1977; Crowley, 1986). But given the exceptional status of Derick and Ritchie, it is, perhaps, not surprising that they would voice opinions encouraging women to assume roles of public

responsibility, as well as stress the importance of judging women on their merits alone. It is additionally significant, however, that despite the attempt to incorporate women into educational structures, there is the attempt to secure female domains of influence within those institutions.

Women's abilities to stand for election to school boards was an important indication of her progress, according to Eliza Ritchie, Convener of the Committee on Education.

I think that there can be no question that women ought to be eligible for School Boards. On the other hand, I urge strongly that women ask for no special privileges. Nothing can be more injurious to women's development than to have things given to them like sugar-plums. We are reasonable human beings, and naturally wish to be treated as such. If the law requires that members of School Boards be elected, let women candidates pass through the mud and mire of the election, making that sacrifice as a patriotic duty for the sake of what, we believe, to be beneficial both to women and to men (NCWC, 1905: 97).

While Ritchie argued that women should ask for no special privileges, she further acknowledged that "there is no position of public responsibility which women are better capable of filling" (NCWC, 1908: 94). While women should be subject to the same selection process, there was the contention that she necessarily brought different qualities to the position. To that end, Ritchie encouraged Local Councils to "work steadily for the removal of any rules or customs which prevent women being eligible to serve on School Boards" while also insisting that they encourage the "right" woman to run as candidates (NCWC, 1905: 97). Indeed, it was only through securing the right type of female representative that women would be able to meet with real progress in male-dominated domains. Local Councils should seek "women candidates possessed of good education, moral

standing, sound sense and energy, that must in time secure the respect and esteem of their masculine co-workers on the School Board" (NCWC, 1908: 94).

Women's roles on school boards would serve to further solidify a position of moral influence and moral suasion. There was little talk in these discussions about the types of duties that women would be expected to perform as School Board members. Instead, attention was paid to her moral standing, gaining the respect and trust of male colleagues, and enlightening public interest in questions relating to education. In these discourses then, women's role is again constructed as a rather passive one of influence and persuasion. As Ritchie notes:

the sympathetic co-operation of well-informed and public-spirited women can do much to elevate and dignify the life of the school, to strengthen the hands of the teacher, and to awaken in the mind of the public an interest and a pride in the great educational system of our country (NCWC, 1910: 45).

While it was expected that women would have a degree of power in these positions, there was no explicit discussion of women as active political, social or educational agents. Instead, her role was one of influence and moral suasion. Through her mere presence, presumably, she would successfully elevate school life, encourage public interest and prove a valuable ally of Canadian teachers. Since the questions relating to education had been constructed as an extension of women's domestic roles, perhaps it is to be expected that the qualities that best qualify them for a position were those linked to prestige, influence and persuasion; the very same qualities that would make her an "ideal mother."

## **From Domestic Science to Education: Women's Participation in the Public Sphere**

An indication of Council's shift from a gender-specific focus on domestic science to a more gender-neutral concern with education can be seen in the 1908 decision to dissolve the Standing Committee on Domestic Science and Manual Training, chaired by Adelaide Hoodless, and replace it with a Committee on Education, chaired by Eliza Ritchie. Discussing this decision, Ritchie suggested that Council's earlier understanding of education was too narrow in focus:

We must remember, too, that education is a term covering far more than the teaching given in schools and colleges. It includes all that makes for the healthy and thorough development of the perfect man and woman in body and mind (NCWC, 1908: 94).

Under the tutelage of Ritchie and, later, Derick, the Committee on Education moved away from a specific concern with domestic science and manual training to a consideration of literacy, the effects of "pernicious" literature, and the training of citizens for the future. But, as this study indicates, even the movement into more gender-neutral domains was predicated on women's private identities as wives and mothers. While the specific concerns relating to the education of women may have expanded to include the provision of healthy literature for children, education in citizenship, and various forms of moral instruction, women's participation in each of these fields remained predicated on discourses that defined these domains as feminine.

The wide ranging discussions of domestic science, women's education, social reform and women on school boards collectively attempted to establish education as a domain that required women's influence and participation. But, it is important to stress that even as these developments were a testament to

women's changing social status, their "natural" and "inevitable" roles as wives and mothers, as guardians of hearth and home, remained relatively stable and unchallenged. Through accepting women's natural gender roles, Council members and educational reformers were able to create a separate sphere for women in education. Throughout Council's discussions of educational reform, there was no attempt to challenge the "naturalness" of women's position within the home. Indeed, the Council's mandate on these issues was to reform education in the direction of better preparing women to assume these roles. But acknowledging women's mission as wives and mothers allowed Council members to posit a role for women in the educational domain that would facilitate and encourage their acceptance of the home as their natural mission.

**Chapter Six**  
**Cultivating the Taste of the Nation**  
**The National Council's Campaign Against "Pernicious" Literature**

---

Since its inception in 1893, the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) has been explicitly concerned with the spread of impure literature and its negative effects on Canadian children and the Canadian nation. Council discourses on "pernicious" literature created a specific form of knowledge about the issue. In Council debates, speeches, discussions and resolutions, impure or "pernicious" literature was constructed as a serious moral, physical and intellectual threat to the Canadian nation. Council's strategies to address this issue reflected not only a concern over the potential harm caused by popular fiction such as dime novels, "penny dreadfuls", romance novels and comics, but also revealed the extent to which Council was engaged in a process of cultivating the values, tastes, and, in Mariana Valverde's (1994) phrase, the "moral capital" of the Canadian public. Concerned over the present and future health of Canadian youth, and by extension, the Canadian nation, the Council outlined a positive path of moral regulation that not only condemned the bad, but sought to cultivate an appreciation of the good. In so doing, Council members created a social and political discourse that revealed deep-seated fears over the moral development of younger generations, the loss of respect for and acquiescence to traditional forms of authority, and the changing social and political roles of Canadian women.

In discussing Council's approach to the issue of impure literature, I want to address its specific strategies of positive reform and regulation, the symbolic and rhetorical dimensions of the debate, and the specific place of the NCWC as representing the informed opinion of organized Canadian women. My central argument in this chapter is that, despite the complexity of issues raised by the problem of impure literature, the NCWC's solution was to reassert the primacy of the family, with the mother as its moral guide, in providing the ultimate defence against the dangers of trashy books and literature. But, at the same time, Council participated in the creation of a public, and politicized, discourse about the responsibilities of Canadian women to their children, and to the nation – responsibilities which necessarily entailed public participation and a strong public role. To this end, the campaign to rid the country of impure literature must also be understood as indicative of the attempt to create a critically-functioning and critically-thinking Canadian public. While this analysis will draw out the operations of class power and social distinction in Council's work, and while it addresses the gendered aspects of this particular moral reform campaign, it also details the creation of a space – and a language – for the discussion, debate, and contestation of these issues.

In discussing the NCWC's campaign against "pernicious" literature, this chapter first considers the institutional role of the organization, the creation of knowledge about the issue, the pursuit of a systematic approach to address the problem, and the creation of a female body of informed public opinion. The Council's reliance on what Kowal (2000) has referred to as "adjustive strategies"

is reflected in its attempts to raise public awareness about the existence of such material, encouraging the promotion of better alternatives, and supporting the implementation of legislation prohibiting the manufacture and sale of “pernicious” material. Within these strategies directed toward male political leaders, and other public officials, the Council also created a symbolic and rhetorical discourse on women’s responsibilities and duties in addressing this problem. Through the process of defining the responsibilities of Canadian mothers, Council members also created a public role for themselves as moral exemplars for other (read: working-class) Canadian women. The chapter then moves on to a consideration of the social influence of print media and the fears of impure literature, discussing the rhetorical connections between popular media and juvenile delinquency, criminal behaviour, and loss of respect for authority. This leads to a discussion of the rhetorical construction and definition of the Canadian public as relatively uneducated, as child-like and in need of moral guidance and instruction. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the moral campaign against impure literature and its connection to a larger process of nation-building.

Throughout this chapter, I use the phrase “pernicious literature” to describe the Council’s campaign. It should be noted however, that Council members used the adjective “pernicious” interchangeably with “impure”, “obscene”, and “questionable.” Indeed, the official name of the committee investigating the issue seems to change from year to year. I have relied on the phrase “pernicious literature” because it was the phrase initially used by Council members, and because it conveys the severity of the concern over such material.

Defined in *The Oxford Dictionary of Current English* as “very harmful or destructive; deadly” the word “pernicious” is a powerful communicator of the fears of the potential effects of dime novels and popular fiction.

### **Enlightened and Informed Public Opinion: The Institutional Place of the NCWC**

In her address to the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada in 1896, the President, Ishbel Aberdeen, stated:

If the NCWC had done nothing beyond warning the fathers and mothers in Canada concerning the possible dangers awaiting their children in the circulation of vile literature, and to put them on their guard against it ... it would have amply justified its existence (NCWC, 1896: iv; quoted in Wilson, 1998: 440).

But, of course, the NCWC did more than warn Canadian parents of the existence and potential harm of this material. Inaugurating a multi-pronged approach to the issue, the NCWC sought, first and foremost, to raise awareness of the “evil” of impure literature. Council meetings served as a forum for discussion on how such material made its way into Canada, and into the hands of Canadian youth, how parents should be informed and educated about this threat to their children, and what strategies should be pursued in eradicating this evil from the Canadian nation.

Positioning itself as an arbiter and creator of public opinion, Council concentrated on educating the Canadian public about the existence of impure literature and its potential harm to Canadian children. Council thus functioned as an enlightened and informed public body seeking to educate presumably ignorant parents about an important issue facing their children.

Addressing the Annual Meeting of Council members in 1895, Agnes Maule Machar, representative from the Kingston Local Council, recounted the opinion of the Secretary of the Children's Aid Society who stated that impure literature was far more prevalent than "most mothers are aware of." She provided a telling example of the ignorance of Canadian mothers of the existence of such material: "in one home where he [the Secretary] had been talking to the mother about it, the mother who thought that her children never saw such literature, on further examination found a copy of the *Police Gazette*, which I believe is one of the worst of these publications, in her boy's room" (NCWC, 1895: 123).

Additionally, reports from several Local Councils, read at the Annual Meeting of 1896, found "that a far greater amount of objectionable literature is being circulated amongst children than the general public has any idea of" (NCWC, 1896: 336).

By 1896, the Sub-Committee on Literature was able to offer a comprehensive report on the insidious circulation of impure literature throughout the nation. The committee detailed how

the names of boys and girls are procured from school pass lists published in newspapers, from lists of names attending social parties, or in some other way, and that specimen papers, etc., are then sent by mail to these children or young people, offering a free supply to them in return for lists of other names ... parents have, in several instances, found such communications in their children's pockets (NCWC, 1896: 335).

Additionally the Sub-Committee noted that "on one of our railway lines, little pictures and booklets of an offensive character have been surreptitiously offered for sale" and others have been distributed as "religious papers" (NCWC, 1896:

336). In light of the encouragement that “all Local Councils dwell on the prevalence of cheap trashy, sensational literature, and its popularity amongst the young,” the Sub-Committee made four recommendations for political, and personal, action (NCWC, 1896: 337). Its first recommendation was to request that the Government amend Section 179 of the Criminal Code

by omitting the words ‘public’ and ‘publicly’ in sub-sections (a) and (b), on the ground that sales of books and papers of the character objected to can now be made privately without any penalty being imposed; and further, that a clause be added imposing a penalty on the manufacture and circulation of such books, papers or pictures (NCWC, 1896: 337).

This recommendation was accompanied with an editorial note stating that it was submitted to the Minister of Justice, who then tabled a Bill incorporating the suggestions that the public and private sale of such material should be prohibited, and that a penalty should be imposed for the manufacture of such goods. However, as noted by Wilson (1998), “the proposed amendments failed to advance beyond the committee stage” (474).

Commenting on the report of the Sub-Committee, Machar outlined the important role of Council in informing public opinion and potentially supporting the efforts of the state: “I am very glad that the Committee has not hesitated to ask for legislation, which is simply the consensus of enlightened public opinion against the grasping cupidity and class selfishness of the few” (NCWC, 1896: 342). In her formulation, Council is presented as a complementary body of the state, embodying the enlightened public opinion necessary for the effective and just governance of the nation. The Council’s position as a complementary body of the state was further reinforced by Mrs. Archibald, a Council member from

Halifax, who stated: "We should never forget that we can render material assistance to the authorities" (NCWC, 1896: 346). This assistance was not limited to lobbying government officials for amendments to the Criminal Code, but also encompassed the surveillance of offensive material and informing authorities of its existence. In her discussion of the importance of keeping track of such material, Archibald suggested the necessity of co-operation between parents and authorities. At a public address she gave on the prevalence of impure literature

a gentleman arose who had been formerly connected for years with one of the post-offices. He said that the post-office authorities would only be too glad if those in whose homes the papers came would only inform the post-office authorities of it. He said there are many ways of changing the appearance of the papers and wrappers so as to make it difficult to detect that they had been brought in (NCWC, 1896: 346).

Hence, in the Council's approach to the problem of "pernicious" literature, there was a crucial role for Canadian parents to be vigilant and informed about the types of material that could enter into their homes. Essential to the Council's approach was not only the support of legislative attempts to suppress such material, but strategies to involve Canadian parents in a larger program of reform. Council focused on the need to educate parents and children, to supply healthier alternatives to sensational literature, and to inform a program of moral regulation and instruction. Council encouraged parents "to be on their guard in this matter" noting that if they find such literature, it should be sent to the President of the Local Council, or some one in a "responsible position" so that further information may be collected (NCWC, 1896: 338). So while Council

advocated increased parental supervision and surveillance of children, it also placed itself on a par with individuals in a “responsible position” who could do something to eradicate such material. This parental supervision and surveillance was combined with an additional responsibility to educate their children about the facts of life, thereby diminishing the allure of sensational and trashy literature. And finally, the Sub-Committee recommended “that all Local Councils and National Societies should make an earnest effort to promote the circulation of cheap attractive, healthy literature, and to make it popular, especially amongst the young people” (NCWC, 1896: 338).

In this early discussion of the Council’s recommended course of action, we can see the position of Council as an organization situated between the public and the private; an organization that informed local, extra-local, and national initiatives to address this issue. For the members of the Council, legislation was just one element in a widespread attempt to “purify the nation.” As the report of the Committee on Pernicious Literature stated in 1900: “These are matters that cannot be dealt with by Act of Parliament, and which therefore call for ceaseless vigilance on the part of all mothers and those who have the care of young people” (NCWC, 1900: 19). While supporting amendments to the Criminal Code and measures to criminalize the manufacture of impure literature, Council discourses also signaled the limits of such political responses and called for the informal moral regulation of parental supervision and surveillance.

This initial discussion of the Council’s approach to the problem of impure literature illustrates how Council created knowledge of the problem, identified and

defined the issue, informed parents, teachers and politicians about the extent of the problem, supported legislation as necessary, and also informed a positive program of moral regulation through the provision of healthy alternatives to sensational and impure literature. Council is then understood as an organization that has an institutional “reach” into several domains in Canadian life: the home, the church, the school, the courts, and the legislature (Emirbayer and Sheller, 1999). As such, Council is representative of an informed, educated and “thoughtful” womanhood raising awareness about an important issue and instigating strategies to effectively deal with it.

### **Creating the Virtuous Mother: “Pernicious” Literature and the Moral Responsibilities of Canadian Women**

While Council discourses on impure literature constructed an image and understanding of the Council itself, and its role in Canadian society, such discourses also constructed an image and understanding of the responsibilities of Canadian women, and specifically the role of mothers in providing moral guidance to their children.

Through their discussions on the roles and responsibilities of Canadian women, Council members outlined the public and private exercise of women’s moral influence. On the one hand, the discussion of how to address the problem of impure literature relied on asserting the responsibilities of Canadian women as moral guardians of the nation’s future generations. These discourses effectively created distinctions between Council women who were representatives of informed and thoughtful womanhood, and the mass of Canadian women who

were largely ignorant of such problems, and themselves in need of moral guidance and instruction. Furthermore, these discourses constructed the Council as the place where Canadian womanhood could find a strong, effective and powerful voice. Hence, without the organization and structure of the Council, Canadian women would have no voice, no influence, and no power. Council, then, is the structure that introduces education, discipline and order to an otherwise amorphous, disorganized and relatively uneducated mass of Canadian women. It is through the NCWC that this mass of women would be organized into a informed and educated public.

Council's discussions of the moral responsibilities of Canadian mothers were inextricably tied to discourses about the legacy of the Canadian nation, women's proper social roles, and the value of moral instruction in the home. In her discussion on "Home Reading Circles," delivered at the Annual Meeting of 1895, Mrs. Whipple made these connections explicit. Concerned that women's increasing social influence may cause them to stray from their first mission, the home, she contended:

Her kingdom is to counsel, not to rule. In the realm of home she is man's coadjutor, not his rival, and in that realm she helps to make or mar the destiny of the nation by her influence upon the characters of the children committed to her care (NCWC, 1895: 306).

Clearly asserting that women's service to the nation rests in fulfilling their proper and natural role as wife and mother, Whipple's commentary goes on to create an instructive and guiding role for the NCWC in preparing women to assume such weighty responsibilities.

If the aim and object of the National Council of Women be to elevate the mental and moral faculties of the women who are bending over the cradles of our future legislators, historians, poets and artisans, then their work will have an inestimable value (NCWC, 1895: 306).

The value of Council's work, then, is understood to be the moral and intellectual uplift of Canadian women. This was further remarked upon by Mrs. Marshall of Kingston who argued that "it seems to me that in training children, we should begin with the mothers, and if we are going to get good mothers we must begin by training the children before they become mothers" (NCWC, 1895: 124). In this circular logic, a role is reserved for Council members in the moral uplift and education of women, in order that they may provide moral guidance for their children, who then become moral and virtuous mothers.

The virtuous mother is the cornerstone on which the future of the nation is built. In her extensive discussion on "How to Provide Good Reading for Children, and how to Protect them from Deteriorating Literature," Lady Schultz from the Winnipeg Local Council contends that the only reading material fit for the nation's children is religious:

To mothers and those who have the care of the young I would beg, begin with the prayer at the cradle, thus seizing the first opportunity for impressing good, with the sacred hymn for a lullaby, and the Book of Books for primary instruction; and the character thus built on truth will be strong and self-reliant (NCWC, 1895: 115-16).

Creating a future generation of intelligent, self-reliant and pure young men and women depends upon the proper moral instruction within the home and from the mother. As she further states, this is indeed woman's *raison d'être*: "thoughtful womanhood can have no higher aim or object in life than to do all in our power to

protect and guide the helpless, and to form the tastes and inclinations of the young aright" (NCWC, 1895: 116).

To the mother falls the enormous task of forming the moral character of children and woe betide the mother who does not seriously consider the pernicious influence of trashy, sensational, or impure literature on her impressionable young children. Lady Schultz related the story of two families, of similar social standing,

one mother of which, when asked what had been her course in protecting her children from deteriorating [sic] literature, said, 'The only course we pursued was never to allow anything in the house that our children could not read.' Her children have grown up around her in honor, beauty and virtue (NCWC, 1895: 114).

Indeed, the honour and virtue of her children reflects upon the mother's moral character. As the moral guide of the family, her kingdom and reward is represented in the lives of her "strong and stalwart" sons, and daughters who "rise up and call her blessed" (NCWC, 1895: 114). The other family, she lamented, indulged their children's tastes for the "yellow-covered dime novel," with predictable and sorrowful results:

One son led a wild and reckless course, meeting with an early and tragic death. The daughter married, was divorced and married again, which tells its own tale. The eldest son lived a dissipated and disgraceful life, and when the younger child was laid in the grave, all said that it was well it should have been taken from the evident evil that lay before it (NCWC, 1895: 115).

The mother's failure in the task of protecting her children from the "evident evil" of pernicious literature means failure in her role as moral guardian of her children and her family.

### **Mother as Martyr: Maternal Sacrifice and the Legacy of the Nation**

An additional characteristic of Council discourses on impure literature was the image of the mother as martyr, willing to sacrifice her soul, and indeed her life, for that of her children. Comments from Mrs. Tilley, at the Annual Meeting of 1896 present the image of women as moral warriors, fighting for the bodies and souls of future generations:

I pray God that we, women of Canada, standing shoulder to shoulder shall make ourselves a wall of adamant, against which these tides of evil may break and fall harmlessly backward, and the children, for whose sakes we have gone down to the gates of death, may find in us a barricade of women determined to protect them from the evil that threatens to destroy them body and soul (NCWC, 1896: 344).

In this view, the role of women in protecting and safeguarding their children becomes a religious mission which elevates the mother as it aims to save the children. But what is additionally significant here is the image that women, united through the work of the Council, become an overwhelming force of good within society. Women's vigilant, organized and thoughtful work is given shape, focus and meaning through the Council. Indeed, "good and faithful stewardship in our Standing Committees is material to the success of all our Councils' efforts in 'social uplifting.'" When women are organized and directed through Council, when women are united for "any principle" then "what an invincible army must it prove!" (NCWC, 1903: 99).

Women's collective organization through Council is a necessary condition for the development of a moral nation, and indeed for the elevation of women within that nation:

Each year as our 'report' has been presented we have hoped to show how necessary it be that, not only as a Women's Council, but as members of our province and nation, and helpers in the great world of humanity, we join hands to accomplish this great work (NCWC, 1907: 53).

Council then becomes the means through which thoughtful womanhood can play a strategic role in the building of a nation and the creation of a moral citizenry.

...And we, who should love to see this Canada of ours builded up in purity of religion, morals, and politics, must realize that any movement to instil or encourage these principles are worthy of our consideration, yea, worthy of some sacrifice (NCWC, 1903: 99).

### **Encouraging Women Along the Righteous Path: Council as Moral Exemplar**

The creation of moral and virtuous goals for Canadian women was at the heart of the attempt to suppress the spread of impure literature. But what lay beneath these initiatives was the assumption that Canadian women must be encouraged and persuaded to follow a moral course – and that Council was the organization to promote such action. Indeed, in her annual "Report on the Spread of Objectionable Printed Matter," Minnie Gardiner argued that

it is good to give a woman a new idea, but surely it is better to give her a high motive. The motives of the noblest actions are lying around us all the time, and the highest IDEAL is purity of life (NCWC, 1904: 67).

Significant for its insistence that women need to be *given* a high motive, the report also clearly presented the Council as the organization through which women could become informed, organized and engaged in Canadian public life. It was also the means through which women came to possess the "moral capital" necessary to carry out such work.

In her discussion of the concept of moral capital, Mariana Valverde (1994) likens the concept to Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) theory of "cultural capital." For Valverde, "the aim of moral reform in a moral-capitalist setting ... is not so much to change behaviour as to generate certain ethical subjectivities that appear as inherently 'moral'" (1994: 216). It is through this cultivation of women's inherent moral subjectivity that the Council creates two important roles for itself. On the one hand, it was the institutional expression of informed, enlightened and educated womanhood, collectively organized to affect positive change in Canadian society. Additionally, as such an embodiment of educated womanhood, Council members were moral guardians and moral exemplars for "other" Canadian women. Careful to assert a productive and appropriate role for women in Canadian public life, Council discourses rested on the public dimension of women's moral influence, and presented the organization as an effective means of achieving the various projects of "social uplifting." In the words of Minnie Gardiner, Convener of the Standing Committee on Pernicious Reading Matter,

The young of to-day are being made good or bad citizens of the future. Can we wholly ignore our position regarding their present surroundings? Would that we had only to present the pure and good, not hunt out the evil (NCWC, 1903: 99).

Rather than advocate a repressive program of censorship, women were encouraged to engage in a program of positive influence and moral guidance, typified by informing public libraries of objectionable material found in their stacks, informing store owners of the relevant laws, and requesting the removal of inappropriate material (NCWC, 1905: 103).

A way to neutralize the spread of these works in small places would be the appointment of a committee of one or two ladies to look at the new books brought to the retail shops and draw the attention of the dealers to those of a pernicious nature (NCWC, 1900: 20).

Woman's greatest weapon was her moral influence, and hence, "every woman can at least use her influence to induce readers to refuse to purchase, audiences to listen, and advertisers to advertise anything that is pernicious" (NCWC, 1905: 101).

That women were expected to lead through example was evident not only in the Council's approach to pernicious literature, but in its regulation of various forms of popular culture. Discussing the influence of popular theatre, it is claimed that

here again the individual influence can accomplish so much; for to range the powerful attractions of the stage on virtue's side, we must each one absolutely refuse to patronize in any way the drama of vice (NCWC, 1903: 98).

Council members demonstrated an understanding of their own social standing and position of influence within society. While it is impossible to determine whether these women actually were moral exemplars for other Canadian women, it is significant that they focus on their ability to influence through example and strive to embody the values and virtues of correct living.

Through this discussion of how the NCWC defined the problems posed by impure literature, and the various solutions it proposed, we can begin to understand how Council created knowledge about impure literature, how it defined the potential harm of such material, and how it placed itself as an

effective means of addressing the problem. At the same time that these discussions effectively presented the Council as an influential and engaged public body, they also created specific understandings of women's social, moral and public roles. In these discourses, Council women emerged as moral exemplars, influencing and educating those women (and some men) who were too busy, too poor, or too uneducated to understand and effectively combat the serious problem of impure literature. While these discourses sought to create an important and influential role for women in Canadian public life, they also created distinctions between the women who would lead such initiatives, and those who would benefit from them. It is in this sense, then, that Council functioned as a specific expression of class interests, as universalizing the imperatives of socially prominent, leisured women.

In his discussion on voluntary associations in Europe in the nineteenth century, Eley (1992) argues that membership in such organizations contributed to the self-formation of the bourgeoisie as the ruling class. He states, "voluntary association was the primary context of expression for bourgeois aspirations to the general leadership of nineteenth-century society" (298). While he is specifically referring to men's organizations in Europe, his arguments are instructive and persuasive when applied to the Canadian context. For the women active in the National Council, their participation in the organization contributed to their own self-understanding as representatives of "organized womanhood." Through coming into contact with contemporaries in other regions of the country, and becoming informed on a variety of issues, middle-class women were able to

claim a degree of moral authority and expertise on the problems posed by “pernicious” material.

Thus far, this discussion has focused on Council’s position on impure literature, and how this position constructed an understanding of Council’s role in Canadian society on one hand, and women’s responsibilities to the home and the nation, on the other. My focus has been on what these discourses “say” about the Council itself, and about women’s responsibilities in Canadian society. I now want to consider what these discourses “say” about print media, about children’s moral development, about the Canadian public, and about the future of the Canadian nation.

### **The Powerful Effects of Popular Media**

Throughout its discussions on impure literature, the Council consistently reminded its readers and listeners of the powerful influence of novels on the young. The Council’s stated concern over the moral development of future generations tacitly suggested that parents, educators and politicians had a tenuous grasp on their roles as moral guardians. At the Annual Meeting of 1895, Lady Schultz claimed:

there is no agency in the world more powerful, in building or destroying character, than the books we read; it is, to a great extent, the pabulum on which the mind is fed; the material from which either strength or weakness is drawn (NCWC, 1895: 108).

The powerful influences of novels are even more persuasive on the impressionable and ill-formed minds of children, who

are either stimulated to admire and imitate high and noble characters, or they are weakened and dwarfed by the bad example of the people set before them and who have been absorbing their attention (NCWC, 1895: 108).

Since novels have an unquestionable influence, for both good and evil, the careful cultivation of good taste is an important prophylactic against the potential “dangerous seed” of impure literature.

While Lady Schultz asserted the powerful influence of books, other Council members took a more modest position with respect to the purported influence of popular novels. In her 1896 discussion of “home reading circles,” Miss Skelton stated that the real danger of books was not that they were overtly bad, but that they may damage or pervert the developing mind. She claimed:

Books may not be actually bad, and yet their influence may have a stunting effect, and if they do not positively impregnate the reader with bad opinions and ideas, they prevent the growth of noble and great ones (NCWC, 1896: 246).

Thus, popular novels had a pernicious and insidious influence upon the minds of the young people who read them. The purported influence and power of these novels was not that they were specifically instructive, but that they were persuasive. The failure of popular literature to encourage the growth of higher thoughts and ideals paved the way for young minds to be corrupted and perverted. While acknowledging that popular literature may not be overtly bad, the prevalence of cheap and trashy literature was a menace and Miss Skelton definitively outlined the results of a taste for such literature:

I feel sure that a great deal of crime, particularly amongst boys, is the effect of reading the Penny Dreadfuls, or the Dime Novel. In these books crime is surrounded by a halo of romance; the so-

called heroes are made enviable by the exciting adventures they go through, and the publicity which they attain. I believe many a boy has started on a downward career through getting false ideas as to the perniciousness of crime from such books (NCWC, 1896: 246).

Concerns over juvenile delinquency and youth crime characterized Council efforts to address the problems of pernicious literature. Indeed, concern over the moral health of future generations emerged as a central justification of the Council's reform efforts. Delivering her address on objectionable printed matter in 1905, Minnie Gardiner stated:

Could stronger evidence of the necessity of our work be given than the voluntary confession of a thirteen-year old girl, now under house arrest in Toronto for an awful murder, that it was seeing and reading the posters of a play that suggested to her the idea of her crime? (NCWC, 1905: 102).

It is in these discussions that popular media such as novels, newspapers, plays, and later movies, are regarded as usurping, threatening and replacing the role of the mother as moral guardian. As Mrs. Tilley states during the Annual Meeting of 1895,

While we as mothers are thinking how we can best train our children while we pray and agonize for them, and while the teachers are thinking of the best way of training them, do you know that this subtle influence going on among our children, utterly unknown to parents, in a great many instances is undoing all the good that we are trying to do? (NCWC, 1895: 123).

Literature, movies, popular plays, and newspaper comics were all regarded by Council members as presenting specific challenges to the social and moral stability of Canadian society. By 1908, the Convener of the committee on objectionable printed matter was calling for the suppression of the newspaper's

comic supplement on the grounds that it “is teaching the children deceit, cunning, disrespect and disobedience. The average supplement is lowering the standard of literary appreciation and debasing the morals of the children” (NCWC, 1908: 57).

This perceived threat to children thus acts as a justification for women’s involvement in these issues. Hence, the campaign against the popularity of dime novels served as the conduit through which middle-class Canadian women cultivated and asserted their “moral capital” and superiority. On the one hand, there was the belief that the traditional role of mother as moral guardian was under threat by the popularity of crime fiction and other forms of popular entertainment. On the other hand, it was through raising awareness about these issues, through creating knowledge about the extent of the problem, and through lobbying politicians, store owners, teachers, and librarians, that these women were able to create a role for themselves in Canadian public life. Through the perception of a threat to their traditional, familial role as private moral guardians that women asserted a somewhat less traditional, social role as public moral guardians.

### **From Suppression to Substitution: Council’s Moral Regulation**

From the years 1894-1900, Council women discussed the perceived threat and danger to the Canadian nation through the presence and popularity of impure, objectionable or pernicious literature. In addition to creating knowledge and raising awareness about the issue, Council also proposed a positive path of

reform through the cultivation of a taste for good literature. From the very beginning, Council members realized that censorship was a blunt instrument that would not “catch” all pernicious or dangerous materials. Indeed, they concluded that “an effort might be made to supply a better class of literature to crowd out such books” (NCWC, 1900: 20). Hence, the Council’s focus was on ways to provide edifying and uplifting alternatives to cheap and trashy literature, and finding ways “to cultivate and not check our children’s imagination” (NCWC, 1895: 121). While the NCWC did support the adoption of legislation on pernicious literature, members also stressed that legislation did not go to the heart of the matter. As one member stated, “I believe that the prohibition of these papers and books would be a very good thing, but I believe that substitution is better than prohibition or even suppression” (NCWC, 1896: 345).

This focus on a positive path of reform and moral regulation was a central distinction between the reform efforts of the NCWC and other organizations such as the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). In his extensive discussion of the “censorship campaigns” of these two organizations, Wilson (1998) asserts “preventive work obviously achieved piecemeal results but did little to diminish the flow of obscene materials on a national scale. To that extent, the thrust of censorship campaigns became primarily prohibitive in nature and required legal strategies and remedies” (467). Wilson demonstrates that both organizations attempted a “renewed partnership with the state” in securing legislation to address the spread of impure literature (468). However, he tends to suggest that these organizations abandoned their efforts to develop an

appreciation of high-quality literature among the Canadian public. Focusing on how these organizations petitioned the state for more stringent regulations, Wilson overstates the juridical aspects of such reform efforts. For the women active in Council, at any rate, specific legislation outlawing the sale and manufacture of objectionable literature was only one aspect of their preventive work.

### **Children at Risk: the Presence of the Other**

Many of the Council initiatives addressing impure literature introduced in the early years were predicated upon the belief that if children were brought up correctly within the home and armed with an appreciation of good literature, they would be protected from the temptations that awaited in the city, in the school yard, or in the neighbourhood. Indeed, Council discussions about the danger of impure literature often constructed the image of innocent and pure children victimized by forces beyond the control of their mothers. In discussing the ways that good children might come into contact with impure literature, Council members also constructed the image of the precocious child, who presented a danger to the moral development of the nation's children. In this sense, Council discourses on impure literature participated in the ambiguous and simultaneous construction of children as innocent and children as potential threat (Saunders, 2002; Adams, 1997; 1995). At the Annual Meeting of 1896, one Council member stated:

**one of the greatest encouragements I ever had was a most beautiful letter from a dear Roman Catholic priest, who for the first time called my attention to the dangers our children encounter in**

the common schools along this very line of evil suggestions ... of immoral pictures and of suggestions by other children (NCWC, 1896: 346).

She further contended that mothers must be ever vigilant since “your child is living in constant danger from the child sitting behind at the next desk” (NCWC, 1896: 347). It is in this sense, then, that cultivating a taste and appreciation for good literature acts as a prophylactic against the undoubtedly pernicious influence of children from other homes.

While the introduction into the school exposed middle-class children to potentially pernicious influences in the form of other children, education also became the means through which middle-class values and tastes were cultivated and protected (Corse, 1997). In the discussion of the importance of developing national literature, a clear link was drawn between education, the cultivation of taste, and the future of the nation: “But it is on the rising generation mainly that the continued development of our national literature will depend. To give them a love of reading is to provide them with a shield against many trials” (NCWC, 1895: 239). There was a presumption that middle-class children were regularly and routinely exposed to good books, but that they faced a danger from children from other parts of the city who did not have such benefits. In the attempt to mitigate against this perceived threat, the NCWC placed a high degree of faith in the education system to raise the morals and tastes of the poorer and working classes:

For children in the poorer quarters of the city, who are not likely to meet with proper books in their own homes, the teachers strive to inculcate a taste for healthy literature by setting apart a time each

week for reading aloud some entertaining matter from standard works for the young (NCWC, 1903: 97).

Once again distinctions were drawn between innocent and dangerous children, and these distinctions also correlated to the perceived “threat” of impure literature. Children from the poorer quarters of the city were presumed to be the “natural” audience for cheap and trashy literature: it was readily available, easily obtained, and cheaply priced (NCWC, 1896: 246; Wilson, 1998: 445). It was, therefore, presumed that these children were raised on a diet of cheap, unhealthy, sensational literature. But other children – those assumed to be the sons and daughters of Council members and women like them – were the obvious audience for good literature. It was this generation of children that deserved the benefit of good, noble, national literature, and this generation of children most in danger from pernicious or impure literature. The suggestion that children from good homes might also constitute an audience for impure literature was simply beyond the pale.

So, the task at hand was a combination of developing and cultivating the taste of middle-class children, while at the same time, attempting to reform, develop and enlighten the tastes of the working classes. At the Annual Meeting of 1900, it was noted that “cheap volumes with attractive titles ... are purchased by young girls employed in small shops and read during unoccupied hours” (NCWC, 1900: 20). Indeed, for Council women, the popularity of sensational literature among working girls presented a serious problem. Very early in the Council’s discussions of the problems of impure literature, the concern to ensure

social stability and class hierarchies was unmistakable. Lady Schultz discussed the effects of novel-reading on Canadian girls:

In the case of domestic servants and young women generally the effect is to produce discontent with the monotony of duty, and a distaste for ordinary simple labor... in that of young school girls it produces a distaste of simple living, and through the medium of the novel their intoxicated wishes learn to stray only too far (NCWC, 1895: 113).

The problems presented by impure literature, then, were not only limited to concerns over the moral health of future generations or the romanticization of crime, but additionally that such sensational literature may challenge or subvert social, class and gender roles. While Council members were concerned specifically with the potential effects of such literature on boys, and the possibility of encouraging a life of crime, their stated concerns of the effects on girls was that it would encourage romantic and fanciful notions of a life not constrained by domestic responsibilities.

### **The Masses and the Public: Reading as a Discipline**

Do we well consider what an immeasurable amount of harm it is capable of doing? Books are such important factors in our lives. The novelist of to-day is the man or woman who reaches the greatest audience. Fancy writing what five thousand may read! Think how the hearts of thousands can be invaded! Novels are in this age the chief reading of the masses, particularly the young. Then let us try to suppress the bad ones (NCWC, 1903: 98).

In the early years of its formation, the Council proposed a systematic, disciplined and organized approach to cultivating the good taste of the Canadian public.

Under the auspices of the National Council of Women, the National Home Reading Union (NHRU) was formed in 1895. At the Annual Meeting of 1896,

Miss Skelton discussed the reading union at length and outlined how it proposed a good and systematic approach to reading.

We are all too apt nowadays, when books and magazines are so cheap, and are to be found everywhere, to read in a desultory way, simply as a kind of distraction, whereas, were we to read a little more regularly and systematically, we should soon find that our minds, instead of being distraught and dissipated in the vain endeavor to keep up with the flood of literary gossip, would become gradually strengthened and filled with thoughts and ideas which would serve as life-giving food (NCWC, 1896: 245-46).

The home reading union was a way to encourage thoughtful and systematic reading “among those who required to be induced to read, and who needed some direction in their choice of books” (NCWC, 1896: 246-47). Membership in the Union included a subscription to a magazine which ran articles on featured books and suggested readings. In order for a member to receive a certificate at the end of the year, he or she must have read at least six of the recommended books (NCWC, 1896: 247).

But the real value of the reading union was its encouragement of the reading of good literature, the development of literacy skills, and the exchange of ideas and opinions about the books under discussion. Discussing the finer details of membership, she stated that individuals could join alone or as part of a group. “This latter method is recommended as being distinctly best when feasible, for, in addition to the advantages gained by reading, there is the still greater advantage of the interchange of ideas and the discussion of moot points” (NCWC, 1896: 247). Commenting on how the reading union work, Skelton suggests the creation of a critically-debating public: “Essays or short papers might be written in answer to the questions which are often asked by the writer of the magazine articles – in

short, the circle meeting might become a very interesting literary or debating club" (NCWC, 1896: 248). The practical application of the reading union, then, was to encourage the Canadian public to read, and debate, a better class of books and novels. The attempt to encourage a wide membership in a reading union was reflected in the suggestions of how such clubs are best formed: "call public or drawing room meetings; ... get clergymen and ministers to interest their congregations; ... get a few people, fond of reading, to start circles, and write notices for the local papers which would attract the attention of the public" (NCWC, 1896: 249). Additionally, suggestions were made that public libraries, as well as organizations such as the YMCA and YWCA should include selected books on their shelves so that they might be readily available to the public (NCWC, 1896: 249). What these strategies indicate is a very deliberate "reaching out" to the masses of the Canadian public in an attempt to engage women and men in a thoughtful, critical, and disciplined approach to leisured reading.

Confronting a then-prevalent opinion that reading novels was a selfish act and a waste of time, the founders of the home reading union instead contended that it was an important act of self-development and self-culture of both the working and the middle classes. As stated by a member participating in the discussion on reading:

there is so much to do in the world it seems a selfishness to take time for self-culture, and yet the world's work needs trained workers, and there is a right self-seeking in order to service. And so I think every woman should claim as her 'right' some time each day to be absolutely alone, to sit still, to read, to rest, to consider (NCWC, 1896: 251).

This participation of middle-class women in self-culture thereby enabled them to develop their own moral and cultural capital, which, in turn, justified their role as cultural, moral, and social arbiters. It is in this sense, then, that the reading union was indicative of the self-formation of the middle classes as a thoughtful and critically-debating public. But at the same time, the Union also intended to encourage the working classes in their pursuit of self-improvement. Indeed, this intention was clearly articulated in the discussion of the reading union:

The courses of reading are divided into three sections: Special, General, and Young People's. The special is intended for those who have had the benefit of a good education, who are desirous of continuing it in their leisure time. The general section is more specially adapted for those of the working classes who wish to improve themselves ... while the Young People's section is for those who have just left school (NCWC, 1896: 247).

Hence, the Home Reading Union, and reading circles generally, were predicated on the idea of practical education – a form of education that sought to “train minds to the level of their capacities” (NCWC, 1895: 306). Within this practical education, a specific role is reserved for well-educated, socially-minded, middle-class women to guide the working classes to self-improvement.

Such an educator will understand the right uses of books as applied to the needs of the hour and the good she wishes to accomplish, never for one moment losing sight of the sifting process that must precede her selection. Think of the magnitude of the task – to rightly determine what is a wise choice, with so much that is good and needful to choose, and so much that is evil to avoid (MCWC, 1895: 306-07).

In this formulation, we see the cultivation of middle-class women as social and cultural exemplars, leading the working classes along appropriate routes to their self-development and improvement. Such actions can be understood as

attempting to develop the “moral capital” of the working classes, while at the same time creating and solidifying the moral and cultural capital of the middle-class women active in such efforts. Despite the fact that debating clubs, societies, and reading groups were becoming popular in Canada in the 1890s, Mrs. Whipple lamented that “the number of really well read people is comparatively few.” She suggested that

the solution may be found in the fact that it is impossible to create a love for reading any more than it is for music or modelling. A feeble imitation may be acquired, but the real love of it is inherent. Your true book lover, like the musician or the sculptor, is born, not made (NCWC, 1895: 307).

Hence, the people who sought to improve themselves through participation in the Home Reading Union would never possess the cultural capital required to become social leaders, that capital remained a virtue of one’s birth, an inherent trait that could not be acquired.

### **Taste and the Canadian Public**

In the attempt to form and reform the reading habits of the working classes, there was the presumption that the Canadian public has naturally bad taste. The task of correcting the bad taste of the public fell to the educated and enlightened women of the National Council, working in concert with teachers, educators, librarians, store owners and legislators. The campaign against impure literature, then, must be understood as more than a call for increased surveillance and censorship. It was part and parcel of a larger process of cultivating, educating and forming the cultural tastes of the public. In addition to the attempts to actually

remove pernicious material from stores and libraries, Council women pursued a wide-ranging project of reform that sought to inculcate in the working classes a taste for good and healthy literature. This program was not limited to dime novels, but also addressed theatre, movies, posters, and the popular press. In the discussions regarding the potential danger of impure or pernicious media Council women constructed specific roles for themselves, for working class women and men, and for children and youth of both sexes. Throughout their discussions, distinctions were drawn between the individuals who possessed the moral and cultural capital to lead such initiatives, and those individuals who were thought to benefit from such efforts. In this sense, then, Council women positioned themselves as "mothers of the nation," whose duty was to rein in the inherent bad taste of the Canadian public. This perception was further illustrated in the comments of Josephine Dandurand, who castigated the press for its sensationalism:

It behooves writers, editors and journalists, who represent the brains of society, to modify its tendencies and lead it towards the desideratum. The spiritual feeders of a half-illiterate nation may fitly consider themselves obliged to alter its diet gradually as wise mothers do. They might, in instructing the masses, proceed by means of instillation. Otherwise the press, universally understood to be, in our mellowed civilization, a light diffusive of knowledge, may prove rather baneful than beneficial (NCWC, 1895: 260).

Hence, the Canadian public is understood to have inherently bad taste, and the masses are presented as children in need of strong maternal guidance. It was through the discipline offered by home reading circles, through substituting good literature for the bad, through educational strategies designed to help the working classes improve themselves that the Canadian mass could be transformed into a

Canadian public. But it was the Council that emerged as the organization to spearhead such initiatives, that educated Canadian women about the dangers facing their children, and provided effective, measured, and rational approaches to solving the problem.

At the conclusion of his discussion on the censorship campaigns of the NCWC and WCTU, Wilson (1998) asserts that women's "maternal role as moral guardians of the family was substantially usurped with the expansion of (male-dominated) federal regulation governing obscenity" (476). While he is correct to point out that women's activism paved the way for the state to regulate these matters, he nevertheless suggests that women's activism was largely focused on enabling state intervention. In contrast, this chapter stresses that the NCWC's approach to impure literature was not an entirely repressive impulse. While Council members endorsed the adoption of legislation outlawing impure literature, they also focused on positive strategies of reform and moral regulation. Ostensibly concerned with the effects of impure literature on the moral development of future generations, Council members advocated an engaged and public role for Canadian women as moral guardians, informal censors, educators, librarians and mothers. The wide-scale project of reforming the taste of the masses depended upon the committed, enlightened, and dedicated participation of Canadian women in the effort to raise awareness and eradicate the potential evil of pernicious literature.

This dissertation has argued that women's participation in Canadian public life was predicated upon the creation of a political culture that demanded and

required their participation. Council discourses on impure literature stressed the extent to which the moral development of children, a province largely in the hands of women within the home, was central to the development and progress of the Canadian nation. The problems of impure literature – its accessibility, affordability and popularity – required an engaged and committed response not only by the nation’s leaders through the drafting of relevant legislation, but also by the nation’s mothers in the development of a wide-ranging program of moral regulation, surveillance, and the reform of popular culture. In addition to the attempt to reform the taste of the masses, Council’s approach to impure literature created a specific public role for women to cultivate the cultural taste of the nation, to create and participate in the education of working classes, to develop their own “moral capital”, and to play a role in the formation of public opinion on these matters.

## Conclusion

### Gender, Communication and the National Council of Women of Canada

---

The most deadly uninteresting person, and the one who has the greatest temptation not to think at all, is the comfortable and happily married woman – the woman who has a good man between her and the world, who has not the saving privilege of having to work. A sort of fatty degeneration of the conscience sets in that is disastrous to the development of thought (McClung, 1972 (1915), 34).

Addressing the pressing question “Should Women Think?” Nellie McClung suggests the ambiguity that greeted women’s participation in the public sphere at the turn of the twentieth century in Canada. Suggesting that the “comfortable, married woman” was perhaps too comfortable and needed to be stirred from her life of leisure, McClung indicated that such women spelled potential disaster for themselves, for all womanhood, and for Canadian society. Acknowledging the cultural climate that encouraged women to concern themselves with the domestic sphere, she nevertheless asserted that if the problems of society were to find adequate resolution, women must participate in a sphere outside their homes.

Canadian historians Kealey (1979), Roberts (1979), Errington (1988), and Prentice et al. (1988) have argued that women’s involvement in public and social issues was motivated by their own feelings of disenchantment with their restricted sphere. Constrained by a lifestyle that confined them to a dependent existence, middle-class women began to orient themselves toward the public sphere, becoming involved in the work of “social uplifting.” It was the drive to address what they perceived as the serious social and moral issues of the time that motivated women to join organizations such as the National Council of

Women of Canada. Part and parcel of the formation of an organization such as the NCWC was the belief that women, as a collective group, must bind themselves together, participate in the discussion of issues of general interest, and create women's public opinion about these matters. Indeed, for Council members, it was necessary for women to think, to join together, and to address the social issues of the day.

This dissertation has analyzed the National Council of Women as a discursive public in Canadian society. Discussing the processes by which Council members informed themselves and each other about issues ranging from woman suffrage to the problem of "pernicious" literature, I have argued that Council members discursively constructed the woman citizen. Focusing on women's responsibilities as wives and mothers, Council discourses sought to invest these privatized identities with public significance. Through the creation of knowledge about woman suffrage, women's education, and "pernicious" literature, Council members defined women's citizenship as a moral duty, as an indication of a just and civilized nation, and a force of good in the world. For Council members, women's quest for recognition as citizens was not motivated by arguments in favour of individual rights, equality, emancipation, or self-interest. Rather, Council sought to organize women into an articulate public, to focus their reform energies, and to make women's work for the nation efficient and effective.

The perception that women required such organization, that they needed to be encouraged to participate in the world outside the home, was reflected in

the Council's discussion of its achievements. Addressing the ways in which the Council had demonstrated its patriotism, Lady Aberdeen, in her retirement address to Council members in 1899, stated:

Our Council is patriotic because it is stirring up a new public spirit amongst its members. It is teaching the women of this country, and especially the mothers, to realize the responsibilities and duties of citizenship and to bring up their children with lofty ideals about public life and a true desire to serve this country not only in war but in peace (NCWC, 1899/1900: 296).

Through "accustoming its members to think ... and calling upon one another to come forward and work," Council attempted to furnish Canadian women with the qualities necessary for useful, and patriotic, work for the nation (NCWC, 1899/1900: 296). Women's participation in Council, then, was not an indication of their desire for personal fulfillment, but rather an indication of their devotion and commitment to the nation. Through their participation in the National Council, Canadian women became informed and engaged participants in Canadian public life. Council members were "ready to think out social problems, ready to spread knowledge, ready to take their share in whatever may be available to them in advancing the common weal" (NCWC, 1899/1900: 296).

The public significance of women's work was, however, rooted in their domestic responsibilities. While women's public participation was constructed as nationally significant, Council's vision of women's citizenship emanated from their position within the home. The fear that women were becoming too comfortable in their routines, that they were ignorant of the great responsibilities that accrued to them in their roles as mothers of the nation's future leaders, necessitated the creation of discourses that invested women's domestic responsibilities with

patriotic significance. Indeed, the rearing of younger generations with a respect for the institutions of public life was accomplished “by a sense of responsibility being pressed home on the women of the nation and the realization of the tremendous influence they possess through their homes and through the tone they set in the Society in which they move” (NCWC, 1899/1900: 297). Educating the mothers to understand and recognize their own role in the creation of a great nation was the heart of the work undertaken by the National Council.

### **Personal Influence and Moral Suasion: Women’s Transcendent Citizenship**

This focus on the influence that women wielded within the home and the tone they set in society resulted in the creation of a form of transcendent citizenship for Canadian women. Careful to identify itself as concerned with women’s duties, and not women’s rights, the Council presented itself as an organization that transcended political parties and influences to represent a “higher patriotism.” In describing its mandate, the Council stressed that its role was to contribute to the creation of women’s public opinion on matters deemed important by its membership. Reluctant to instigate activism on specific issues, the Council saw itself as providing moral and institutional support to issues such as domestic science training, votes for women, women on school boards, and the eradication of “pernicious” literature.

For individual Council members, this transcendent citizenship was rooted in their commitment to moral and social reform, their presumed moral superiority, and their self-definition as moral exemplars to other women and to male leaders.

Council members defined a form of transcendent citizenship that elevated their work within the organization and invested it with public moral significance. For the remainder of the female population, for women who were not active in Council, but were responsible for raising future generations, transcendent citizenship was rooted in their position within the home. Women's greatest contribution to national life was the raising of sons with "lofty ideals about public life" (NCWC, 1899/1900: 296). As for the nation's daughters, they must be raised with "lofty ideals" about their duties and responsibilities within the domestic sphere.

While these discourses were significant for envisioning new social subjectivities for middle-class female reformers, they nevertheless reinforced women's separate status by differentiating their citizenship. Women were not citizens equal with men, they were feminized citizens, recognized and acknowledged for the work they carried out within the home and within "feminized" public spheres. Through the creation of specific forms of knowledge on woman suffrage, women's education and "pernicious" literature, Council members argued that public life required women's thoughtful, organized, and efficient participation. Bringing their own values to bear on public life, Council members stressed that women's enfranchisement would elevate the tone of public life, that domestic science courses would impress upon young girls the importance of keeping a good home, that female representatives on school boards would bring a deeper morality to bear on educational issues, and that "pernicious" literature would hold no sway over children raised properly.

Through these discourses, women emerged as important symbols and agents of political power. Women's participation in public life was an indicator not only of their recognition as feminized citizens, but also of an enlightened, just, and civilized nation. Council activism on issues such as suffrage, education, and "pernicious" literature was an attempt to secure recognition for the ways in which women practiced and performed citizenship. Such activism necessarily postulated a more expansive definition of citizenship to include women's work in the home, their raising of children, their work in moral and social reform. Council members additionally argued that women's concerns were central to the future development of the nation and deserved recognition and representation in law and policy.

This dissertation argues that these are ambiguous, if not contradictory, developments. On the one hand, women's participation in organizations such as the National Council challenged the prevalent assumptions that women had no interest in public life, that married women's interests were adequately represented by their husbands' votes, and that the private sphere was a domain free from political power and influence. On the other hand, however, such participation was justified through the creation of a form of citizenship rooted in the "natural" fact of women's difference and their distance from the category of "universal" citizen. While such discourses provided a degree of recognition and legitimacy of women's work within the home, they nevertheless reinforced women's separate, and subordinated, status within the home and within society.

Through the creation of knowledge about woman suffrage, education and “pernicious” literature, Council members attempted to expand and democratize the public domain to enable and facilitate women’s participation. With respect to these specific issues, women’s activism was configured as personal influence and moral suasion. “Women’s sphere” in these discourses, was constructed as a domain separate from the male dominated realms of politics. As an organization, the National Council was a parallel domain for women’s public participation. As demonstrated in the discussions on woman suffrage and female representatives on school boards, Council members consistently shied away from advocating women’s direct participation in political processes. In the case of woman suffrage, for example, women were not encouraged to run for public office. Rather, they were encouraged to use their votes wisely to elect men of strong moral character to represent them. Although Council members stressed the necessity of securing female representatives on school boards, this was defended on the grounds that they would exert a positive moral influence on male representatives. In the Council’s approach to “pernicious” literature, the practice of women’s citizenship was clearly rooted in the exercise of personal and moral influence. For Council members, the most effective way to address the problem of “pernicious” literature was to awaken mothers to the responsibility of instilling in their children a love for tasteful, healthy literature. While Council members were concerned with the spread of “pernicious” literature and its accessibility to children, they stressed that it was a mother’s responsibility to ensure that her children were protected from such material. But there were

additional public outlets for this surveillance as well. Women were encouraged to monitor local stores and libraries for questionable reading matter, to inform shopkeepers of relevant legislation, and request the removal of “pernicious” material. These strategies provided Council women, and all women in Canada, with an important social role as public moral guardians.

Through their activism on these issues, Council members and other female reformers challenged prevalent stereotypes that consigned women to the private sphere. Indeed, as Douglas (1977) and Dorland and Charland (2002) note in their separate discussions on the emergence of women in public, discourses that stressed women’s sentimentality, emotionality, and virtue provided them with a moral authority to assert themselves in public and press for social change. In the public expression of their moral outrage, female social reformers could be angry and aggressive, qualities that would normally place them outside the domain of “proper femininity.” In their discussion on the role of moral reform in the early women’s movement, Dorland and Charland (2002) note that social and moral reform campaigns “required that women address the public sphere as citizens, that they be ‘manly’ in advocating and defending public domestic virtues” (207). But while these discourses suggested women’s equality through asserting their rights to participate in the public sphere, such participation was ultimately grounded in the exertion of influence as opposed to the exercise of power.

## **Women's Influence and Political Power**

Perhaps one central question that remains unanswered in this analysis is whether the National Council was effective in its strategies. Were Council members successful in their attempts to influence male leaders? Given that women's citizenship was constructed and defined as the exertion of influence, direct and tangible evidence of their effects is difficult to provide. Council members declared moral victories when women were granted voting privileges, when women became representatives on school boards, when domestic science training was adopted in schools throughout the nation. For women active on these issues, the support of the National Council was an important indicator of the legitimacy of the issues raised and debated. But whether it was the participation of Council members that finally secured women's voting privileges, for example, is quite difficult to demonstrate. More to the point, for women active in the National and Local Councils, the central issue was not to ensure increased political power for women. Indeed, their object was the cultivation of women's influence within the home, and the expansion of that influence to a national scale. While this process resulted in the creation of an "ethical subjectivity" for the nation's women, it nonetheless reinforced their separate status and their distance from the values that characterized men's citizenship.

Contemporary scholars Douglas (1977), Baker (1984), Dorland and Charland (2002) and Hunt (1999) have detailed the processes by which middle-class women created space in public for their recognition as citizens. For these scholars, the years from 1850s to the early 1900s were paramount in the

construction of a public sphere where citizenship was conceptualized as an ethical, moral and virtuous practice. Hunt (1999) argues that the moral and social reform campaigns through which British feminists found access to the public sphere were central to the process of the “self-formation” of the middle-classes as moral and cultural exemplars.

For Douglas (1977), the process of the “feminization” of American culture meant that “women’s” citizenship was always already differentiated from men’s, and linked to the private sphere of morality, sentimentality, and virtue. Such political and public activism necessarily led to a transformation of public and private spheres as personal characteristics like ethics and virtue, began to have public significance. Dorland and Charland (2002) suggest that Canadian women’s activism on suffrage and moral reform “broadened the notion of civil culture by introducing into it the principle of care for others, even as they politicized the role of motherhood” (259). These processes, they continue, were intimately connected to the constitution of Canada as “an ethical nation, where personal virtue became political” (259). Baker (1984) asserts that the “domestication” of politics in the United States in the late nineteenth century transformed the public and the private spheres of civil society. Creating their own political culture, “women carried out social policy through voluntary action. They practiced a kind of interest-group politics, by directing their attention to specific issues and exercising influence through informal channels” (647).

Historians Mitchinson (1987), Offen (1988) and Koven and Michel (1990) note that women’s activism on social issues was an important precursor to the

development of the social welfare state in Canada, the United States and Europe. At the same time that citizenship was being invested with moral and ethical virtues, there was the development of the notion of “the benevolent state” where an additional aspect of political power was to ensure a degree of stability and security for its citizens (Moscovitch and Albert, 1987). The role of voluntary associations, philanthropic and charity organizations, and various women’s movements was paramount in this process. Indeed, as noted by Christie and Gauvreau (1996), women’s activism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was centred on “motherhood” issues and paved the way for the state provision of social assistance, family and mothers’ allowances, and labour laws. While it may be difficult to trace the precise level of influence wielded by women in the National Council, the organization was part and parcel of the interpenetration of public and private spheres which shaped the development of the social welfare state.

This analysis of the NCWC also prefigures the involvement of the Canadian state in culture and communication policy. In his discussion on the development of Canadian film culture in the 1930s, Acland (1994) details the process by which culture and leisure became national concerns. He argues that the 1930s witnessed the emergence of a number of organizations and voluntary societies “with expressly nationalistic intent” (5). Emerging at a time when Canada was “negotiating the end of its colonial status,” these cultural organizations (such as the National Film Society of Canada) “were generally concerned with the problem of national unity, often with a specific stress on

culture: how was a Canadian population to emerge as *national* citizens with the desired characteristics?" (5, original emphasis). The answer proposed by educators, cultural critics, and filmmakers such as John Grierson was the development of a Canadian national and educational cinema. Acland argues that a cultural elite of "mostly white, Anglophone males" agreed that the problems of Canadian culture "concerned the quality of public taste, public education and citizenship in the age of mass communication" (7).

While my discussion of the National Council of Women predates the formation of this educational approach to national culture, as well as the involvement of the Canadian state in communication policy, issues of national unity, culture and citizenship were of central concern to Council members in the years 1893-1918. Most prominent in their discussions on education and "pernicious" literature, the popular taste, leisure pursuits, and reading habits of the Canadian public were an abiding concern for women active in the Council. Perhaps more tellingly, Council members stressed that women had a significant role to play in nation-building. In her inaugural address at the first Annual Meeting of the National Council, Lady Aberdeen articulated the connections between women's rising public prominence and the duties of citizenship:

Day by day strangers come into this beautiful land, young men and maidens, on whom the future of this country depends ... Are they to be a source of strength or of weakness? We recognize that these strangers need binding together with ourselves by a power far stronger than can be supplied by laws or government, and is not that power largely in the hands of women? (NCWC, 1984: 12).

Asserting that it was women's endeavours that would successfully integrate "new comers" into Canadian society, Aberdeen linked such activities to cultural

associations, literacy, education, and the representation of women on public bodies such as immigration boards, prisons, and schools. I have argued that the National Council contributed to the discursive creation of domains in public life receptive to – and indeed dependent upon – women’s participation. The extent to which these projects were then taken up by male politicians, policy makers and cultural critics is beyond the scope of this analysis. However, I do wish to suggest that the National Council was one of many organizations that created an understanding of the public domain as an area that required the intervention of social reformers, educators, and women, and that such social activism prepared the way for the intervention of the state in these domains.

### **Bypassing Dichotomies: Thinking Beyond Radical vs. Conservative**

In attempting to make a contribution to the extant literature on the history of the women’s movement in Canada, this dissertation has argued that the division between “radical” and “conservative” female reformers has truncated our understanding of “first wave” feminism. This trope of a tension between radical and conservative forces has been usefully deployed to characterize the women’s movement in the United States (Kraditor, 1971; O’Neill, 1969). However, contemporary communications scholars have argued that such divisions do not adequately characterize the American women’s movement. For Dow (1991), the “womanhood” rationale employed by Frances E. Willard of the U.S. chapter of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union enabled her to garner support for woman suffrage with conservative audiences. Kowal (2000) asserts that

American suffragists overwhelmingly employed the “adjustive” strategies of petitions, parades and protests to encourage public support for woman suffrage. She states, “while militancy may have been evident in the radical fringes, the American women’s suffrage movement was primarily non-violent and used more conventional or adjustive strategies of protest” (241).

The research undertaken in this dissertation also suggests that invoking binary oppositions potentially blocks an understanding of the discursive and rhetorical strategies of first wave feminists. Social historians like Kealey (1979), Roberts (1979), Mitchinson (1979), Bacchi (1982) and Strong-Boag (1977) have contributed to our understanding of the class imperatives at work in the first wave of the feminist movement. However, they tend to suggest that “conservative” forces co-opted the radical potential of first wave feminism. In these instances, the reliance on a radical/conservative dichotomy mislocates the central tensions and dilemmas in the Canadian case. I have attempted to problematize the historiography of the first wave women’s movement in Canada by focusing on an admittedly conservative and moderate women’s organization. Concerned to provide a meeting ground between “radical” and “conservative” women, the National Council’s mandate was to attempt to strike a reasonable compromise between these two perspectives. While it may be possible to suggest that the National Council is a textbook example of the conservative co-optation of radical impulses, this dissertation suggests that such an analysis is too simplistic.

For social historians writing in the late 1970s and early 1980s, most significantly those contributors to Kealey (1979), as well as Bacchi’s (1979; 1982;

1983) work on the woman suffrage movement and Strong-Boag's analysis of the National Council of Women (1976), social class emerges as the primary category of analysis. For these scholars, the radical potential inherent in women's collective organizing was subverted through the ascendance of class consciousness and the fracturing of women's collective identity (see Baker, 1984 for a discussion of this process in the American context). For Strong-Boag (1976) and for Bacchi (1983), the National Council of Women is an example of the proliferation of middle-class values throughout society and the subversion of radical impulses that may have challenged women's consignment to the domestic sphere. For scholars like Roberts (1979), the National Council emerges as an organization that sought to arrest the radical potential of the "new" woman and re-direct her energies toward the domestic sphere. Indeed, Council's activism on domestic science, "pernicious" literature, and woman suffrage consistently reaffirmed women's commitment to the home and sought to domesticate their public ambitions. For Snell (2003), women's campaigns to ensure the inclusion of domestic science courses for girls in public schools was the example, *par excellence*, of conservative, middle-class women's attempts to arrest the progress of social change.

While these analyses are insightful and certainly have contributed to the development more critical perspectives on the first wave women's movement, they tend to simplify the social changes that were occurring and reduce them to a form of class determinism. As Forbes (1985) notes in his critique of Bacchi (1983), for example, there was no easy division between "progressive" suffragists

and “conservative” temperance advocates. He argues that the attempt to divide the women’s movement into these distinct camps neglects an analysis of women’s participation in a variety of moral, social, and political issues.

### **Invoking Representative Status: Council Women as Moral Exemplars**

Drawing on literature in communication, political theory and women’s and gender history, this dissertation attempts to draw attention to the inter-connections between gender identity, nation-building, communication and women’s organizations. In his discussion on the proliferation of voluntary associations in Europe in the nineteenth century, Eley (1992) stresses the connection between voluntary participation and the cultivation of the bourgeois male’s moral authority (297). He states, “voluntary association was in principle the logical form of bourgeois emancipation and bourgeois self-affirmation” (298). This dissertation argues that the National Council was a key organization through which middle-class women presented themselves as moral exemplars. Through its position as a non-denominational organization and through the creation of knowledge about issues affecting middle-class women specifically, the National Council helped to create a social and public subjectivity for them. In the process, it also presented itself as the organizational expression of “women’s public opinion.” Through discourses on woman suffrage, women’s education and “pernicious” literature, the National Council claimed the status of a “representative public” of Canadian women. Encouraging women, and especially mothers, to become informed about these issues, Council also presented itself as the organization that gave

collective voice and legitimacy to these concerns. Comprised of Local Councils of Women and national societies, the National Council claimed representatives in every region of the nation. Convinced that such broad membership authorized its status as “representative,” the National Council envisioned itself as “the” voice of “organized womanhood.”

This dissertation has additionally suggested the extent to which the Council’s “representative” status may have been more a rhetorical and discursive, rather than material, accomplishment. As discussed in chapter two, the Council’s decision to retain the practice of silent prayer at Annual Meetings cost the organization the national affiliation of both the Young Women’s Christian Association and the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. Additionally, cultural tensions between English-speaking and Francophone Council members ultimately resulted in the creation of a separate Francophone association of women, the Fédération Nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste in 1907. But perhaps because of these challenges, the Council’s insistence that it was a representative voice of Canadian women is all the more suggestive of its attempt to claim status as a moral exemplar.

### **Gender, Nation, and Communication**

The multiple spheres of women’s public participation requires an analytical and theoretical frame sensitive to the operation of class consciousness, gender identity, and nation-building, and how these forces shaped and potentially constrained women’s participation in the public sphere. This dissertation has

foregrounded the structures of class, gender, and nation in the attempt to offer a more nuanced and complex picture of the political and social context of women's participation in Canadian public life. Through an analysis of the discourses produced by this national women's organization, we can shift the focus from radical versus conservative tensions to a consideration of the multiple perspectives on femininity, motherhood, women's public activism, nation-building, and women's responsibilities. Comprised of traditional and progressive women, suffragists and anti-suffragists, those who wanted a wider sphere for women and those who wanted to reassert her central role within the home, the Council defies easy categorization as a progressive or conservative organization. But this study has demonstrated that for both progressive and traditional women, the home was understood and consistently reasserted as women's central domain and responsibility.

I have focused on the public articulation of women's gender identity as the primary object of analysis in this dissertation. Drawing on Cohen's (1995) insight that gender is a "generalized form of communication," I have attempted to demonstrate how women's identities as mothers of the nation's future leaders was invoked to justify their participation in the public sphere, to furnish them with moral authority, and to legitimate their "natural" role within the home. Women's gender identity was thus contradictory to the extent that it provided them with access to a domain larger than the domestic sphere at the same time that it reasserted the primacy of that sphere for all women.

For the women active in the NCWC, their gender identity as wives and mothers was a central symbol and characteristic of their public communication. Women's "expertise" as mothers, as guardians of the home, enabled the articulation of a public discourse on women's citizenship, their duties and responsibilities. It was through thematizing women's responsibilities that women themselves became communicative actors, and created a self-identity as gendered citizens, as moral exemplars, and as "organized womanhood." But, at the same time, these discourses did not seek to challenge or subvert women's position in the home. Rather, they sought to secure public recognition for them as citizens. Ultimately, by analyzing gender as a generalized form of communication we can begin to understand how women were able to claim a degree of public moral authority and legitimacy through invoking their privilege and expertise as mothers. However, at the same time, such discourses stressed that motherhood and child-rearing were women's destiny, that women were "naturally" predisposed to concern themselves with issues affecting them, their children, and their families. Gender, in its function as a generalized form of communication, enabled middle-class women to claim public space and legitimacy for the expression of their concerns as women and as mothers. However, as Cohen makes clear, generalized forms of communication enable conversation only up to a certain point. Hence, women were not able to challenge the dominant understanding that women's primary duties and responsibilities revolved around the home.

This study reveals the extent to which discursive constructions of womanhood were deeply implicated with nation-building projects. Indeed, women's "work for the nation" was a central characteristic of Council discourses on women's public activism. In detailing women's responsibilities within the home, Council discourses constructed "woman" as a guiding light to her children, her husband, and for all women nation-wide. In articulating how this privatized identity had public resonance, Council discourses on suffrage, education and "pernicious" literature celebrated women's "purity", their self-sacrifice, and their moral superiority. They were thought to be capable of elevating the tone of public life, encouraging men to follow a moral path, and raising sons with a healthy respect for public life and political institutions. The deep irony here is that women were able to claim a political subjectivity only to the extent that they reinscribed politics as a masculine domain, and the domestic sphere as women's calling. While women's citizenship was expressed in "feminine" qualities such as purity, virtue, and self-sacrifice, the point of its exercise was to chasten men's arrogance and make them "worthy of themselves." That their moral influence did not find an outlet in raising public-spirited daughters suggests the extent to which these discourses were deeply gendered.

### **Citizenship, Culture, and Communication**

This study has focused on the first twenty-five years in the institutional life of the National Council of Women of Canada. By focusing on its formative years, I have

attempted to demonstrate the historical specificity of women's participation in Canadian public life and their attempts to claim legitimacy as the moral conscience of the nation. My analysis suggests that through feminizing the domains of citizenship, education and culture, middle-class women created a role for themselves in the cultural and political life of the nation. Through discourses stressing the public and private functions of women's citizenship, Council members constructed its moral and ethical imperatives. While first wave feminism was largely concerned with securing increased legal rights and recognition for women, this analysis also demonstrates the extent to which middle-class women were concerned with cultural and educational issues. Indeed, for Council members, women's citizenship had social and moral, as well as political, values.

This process of investing citizenship with moral and ethical values continues to have resonance today in contemporary debates about media, Canadian culture, and communication. While the factors that shaped middle-class women's emergence into the public sphere were historically specific, the discourses produced by Council members created a lasting legacy through defining women's citizenship as a moral and ethical practice. I wish to suggest that such discourses paved the way for conceptualizing Canadian culture in moral and ethical terms. As noted by Mackey (2002), Corse (1997) and Wright (2001), culture in Canada has been invested with a variety of political, ethical and moral values. Particularly evident in cultural policy discourse, Canadian culture has been saddled with the weighty responsibility of providing a high culture

alternative to the crass commercialism of American popular culture (Gasher, 1997). Canadian culture has also been linked to nation-building projects through the insistence that Canadian films, novels, and television programming reflect “Canadian” values and provide images, stories and myths to unite a disparate population (Blundell, Shepherd, and Taylor, 1993). My analysis indicates that Council members shared a vision of the public sphere in which such undertakings would be carried out by private individuals, in this case, middle-class women, with “public” interests. Indeed, for Council members, the specific projects of moral reform, character formation, and citizenship were expressly “feminized” projects. To the extent that these individuals argued that citizenship, education and culture were also concerns for the Canadian state, we can suggest that such activism prepared the way for increasing state intervention in the public domain.

Drawing attention to the discourses produced by women active in the National Council at the turn of the twentieth century, I have stressed the complexity and the contradictions of women’s participation in the public sphere. It is my hope that by focusing on the NCWC as a discursive public that sought to enable and legitimate women’s communication, I have made a contribution to our understanding of how women sought to make meaning, create knowledge and participate in a world outside their homes. Women’s groups and organizations such as the NCWC aimed to provide women with opportunities to participate in and shape an emergent public and political culture. Additionally, the organization sought to facilitate communication between “organized womanhood” and the

male leaders who held direct political power. Organizing themselves into articulate publics, Canadian women found increasing routes to public and political influence. The extent to which membership in the NCWC and similar organizations facilitated women's participation in arts organizations, civic leagues, educational groups, and media organizations, remains to be undertaken. I believe this dissertation has suggested that such investigations would greatly contribute to our understanding of Canadian public life.

## References

### Primary Sources

- National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC). (1894). *Women Workers of Canada: Being a Report of the Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting and Conference of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Ottawa: Thoburn and Company.
- . (1895). *Women Workers of Canada: Being a Report of the Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting and Conference of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Toronto: Oxford Press.
- . (1896). *Women Workers of Canada: Being a Report of the Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting and Conference of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Montreal: John Lovell and Son.
- . (1897). *Women Workers of Canada: Being a Report of the Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Meeting and Conference of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Kingston: British Whig.
- . (1898). *Women Workers of Canada: Being a Report of the Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Meeting and Conference of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Kingston: British Whig.
- . (1899/1900). *Verbatim Report of the Sixth Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Ottawa: Taylor and Clarke, Printers. (Meetings held in 1899).
- . (1900). *Report of the Seventh Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Ottawa: Taylor and Clarke, Printers.
- . (1901). *Report of the Eighth Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Printer Information not Available.
- . (1902). *Report of the Ninth Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Toronto: Arthurs and Co., Printers.
- . (1903). *Report of the Tenth Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Toronto: Geo. Parker, Oxford Press.
- . (1904). *Women Workers of Canada: National Council of Women of Canada Yearbook: Report of the Eleventh Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada*. London: C. P. Heal and Co.

- . (1905). *Report of the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Toronto: W.S. Johnston and Coy, Printers.
- . (1906/1907). *Report of the Thirteenth Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Toronto: W.S. Johnston and Coy, Printers. (Meetings held in 1906).
- . (1907). *Report of the Fourteenth Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Toronto: G. Parker and Sons, Printers.
- . (1908). *The Year Book, Women Workers of Canada: Report of the Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Toronto: Geo. Parker and Sons, Printers.
- . (1909). *Report of the Sixteenth Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Toronto: G. Parker and Sons, Printers.
- . (1910). *The Year Book: Women Workers of Canada: Report of the Seventeenth Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Toronto: G. Parker and Sons, Printers.
- . (1911). *Women Workers of Canada: Report of the Eighteenth Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Toronto: G. Parker and Sons, Printers.
- . (1912). *Women Workers of Canada: The Year Book Containing the Report of the Nineteenth Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Toronto: G. Parker and Sons, Limited.
- . (1913). *Women Workers of Canada: The Year Book Containing the Report of the Twentieth Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Toronto: Parker Bros. Limited, Printers.
- . (1914). *Women Workers of Canada: The Year Book of the National Council of Women of Canada Containing the Annual Reports of the Officers, Standing Committees, Local Councils and Nationally Organized Societies in Affiliation*. Published by the National Council of Women of Canada. No printer given.
- . (1915). *The Year Book of the National Council of Women of Canada, Proceedings of the Twenty-second Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Brantford: Hurley Printing Co.
- . (1917). *The Year Book of the National Council of Women of Canada: Proceedings of the Twenty-fourth Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Toronto: Bryant Press.

———. (1918). *The Year Book of the National Council of Women of Canada: Proceedings of the Twenty-fifth Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Toronto: Bryant Press.

### Secondary Sources

Acland, Charles. (1994). "National Dreams, International Encounters: The Formation of Canadian Film Culture in the 1930s." *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 3 (1), 3-26.

Adams, Mary Louise. (1995). "Youth, Corruptibility, and English-Canadian Postwar Campaigns against Indecency, 1948-1955." In *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 6 (1), 89-117.

———. (1997). *The Trouble With Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Allen, Judith. (1990). "Contextualizing Late-Nineteenth-Century Feminism: Problems and Comparisons." *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 1, 17-36.

Arato, Andrew and Jean L. Cohen. (1992). *Civil Society and Political Theory*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Bacchi, Carol. (1979). "Divided Allegiances: The Response of Farm and Labour Women to Suffrage" In Linda Kealey, (Ed.). *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s* (pp. 89-107). Toronto: The Women's Press.

———. (1982). "'First Wave' Feminism in Canada: The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918." *Women's Studies International Forum* 5 (6), 575-583.

———. (1983). *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

——— and Chris Beasley. (2002). "Citizen Bodies: Is Embodied Citizenship a Contradiction in Terms?" *Critical Social Policy* 22 (2), 324-352.

Backhouse, Constance. (1991). *Petticoats and Prejudice: Women and the Law in Nineteenth Century Canada*. Toronto: The Women's Press.

Baker, Paula. (1984). "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920." *American Historical Review* 89 (3), 620-647.

- Bennett, Paul. (1986). "The Canadian Women's Movement, 1880-1920s: A Struggle for Political Rights or Social Reform?" In Paul W. Bennett and Cornelius Jaenen, (Eds.) *Emerging Identities: Selected Problems and Interpretations in Canadian History* (pp. 376-405). Scarborough: Prentice-Hall.
- Benhabib, Seyla. (1992). *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Black, Naomi and Gail Cuthbert Brandt. (1993). "Alcohol and the First Canadian Women's Movement." *Etudes Canadiennes/Canadian Studies* 35, 95-106.
- Blair, Karen J. (1979). *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914*. New York: Holmes.
- Bland, Lucy. (1995). *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex, and Morality, 1885-1918*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Blundell, Valda, John Shepherd, and Ian Taylor. (1993). "Editors' Introduction." In Valda Blundell, John Shepherd, and Ian Taylor (Eds.), *Relocating Cultural Studies: Developments in Theory and Research* (pp. 1-17). London: Routledge.
- Bird, Elizabeth. (1998). "'High Class Cookery': Gender, Status and Domestic Subjects, 1890-1930." *Gender and Education* 10 (2), 117-131.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Richard Nice (trans.). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Boutilier, Beverly. (1994a). *Gender, Organized Women, and the Politics of Institution Building: Founding the Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada, 1893-1900*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Carleton University.
- . (1994b). "Helpers or Heroines? The National Council of Women, Nursing, and 'Woman's Work' in Late Victorian Canada." In Dianne Dodd and Deborah Gorham (Eds.), *Caring and Curing: Historical Perspectives on Women and Healing in Canada* (pp. 17-47). Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press.
- Brandt, Gail Cuthbert. (1985). "Organizations in Canada: The English Protestant Tradition." In Paula Bourne (Ed.) *Women's Paid and Unpaid Work: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (pp. 79-95). Toronto: New Hogtown Press.

- Brouwer, Ruth Compton. (1990). *New Women for God: Canadian Presbyterian Women and India Missions, 1876-1914*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- . (2002). *Modern Women Modernizing Men: The Changing Missions of Three Professional Women in Asia and Africa, 1902-69*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Calhoun, Craig. (1993). "Civil Society and the Public Sphere." *Public Culture* 5, 267-280.
- Christie, Nancy and Michael Gauvreau. (1996). *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900-1940*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- . (2003). "Modalities of Social Authority: Suggesting an Interface for Religious and Social History." *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 36 (71), 1-30.
- Cleverdon, Catherine Lyle. (1974). *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Clio Collective. (Micheline Dumont, Michèle Jean, Marie Lavigne, Jennifer Stoddart). (1987). *Quebec Women: A History*. Roger Gannon and Rosalind Gill, (Trans.) Toronto: The Women's Press.
- Cohen, Jean L. (1995). "Critical Social Theory and Feminist Critiques: the Debate with Jürgen Habermas." In Johanna Meehan, (ed.) *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse* (pp. 57-80). New York and London: Routledge.
- Cook, Ramsay. (1974). "Introduction." *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* (pp. vi-xxv). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Cook, Sharon Anne. (1995). *"Through Sunshine and Shadow" The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Evangelicalism, and Reform in Ontario, 1874-1930*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Corse, Sarah M. (1997). *Nationalism and Literature: The Politics of Culture in Canada and the United States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cott, Nancy F. (1989). "What's in a Name? The Limits of 'Social Feminism'; or, Expanding the Vocabulary of Women's History." *The Journal of American History* 76 (3), 809-829.

- Crowley, Terry. (1986). "Madonnas before Magdalenes: Adelaide Hoodless and the Making of the Canadian Gibson Girl." *Canadian Historical Review* 67 (4), 520-547.
- Danylewycz, Marta. (1991). "Domestic Science Education in Ontario, 1900-1940." In Ruby Heap and Alison Prentice, (Eds.) *Gender and Education in Ontario: An Historical Reader* (pp. 129-147). Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Dean, Jodi. (1992). "Including Women: the Consequences and Side Effects of Feminist Critiques of Civil Society." *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 18 (3/4), 379-406.
- . (1996). "Civil Society: Beyond the Public Sphere." In David Rasmussen, (ed.) *Handbook of Critical Theory* (pp. 220-242). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- . (2001). "Cybersalons and Civil Society: Rethinking the Public Sphere in Transnational Technoculture." *Public Culture* 13 (2), 243-266.
- Devereux, Cecily. (1999). "New Woman, New World: Maternal Feminism and the New Imperialism in the White Settler Colonies." *Women's Studies International Forum* 22 (2), 175-184.
- Dietz, Mary G. (1985). "Citizenship with a Feminist Face: The Problem with Maternal Thinking." *Political Theory* 13 (1), 19-37.
- DiQuinzio, Patrice. (1999). *The Impossibility of Motherhood: Feminism, Individualism, and the Problem of Mothering*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Dorland, Michael and Maurice Charland. (2002). *Law, Rhetoric, and Irony in the Formation of Canadian Civil Culture*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Douglas, Ann. (1977). *The Feminization of American Culture*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Dow, Bonnie J. (1991). "The 'Womanhood' Rationale in the Woman Suffrage Rhetoric of Frances E. Willard." *Southern Journal of Communication* 56 (4), 298-307.
- . (1999). "Historical Narratives, Rhetorical Narratives, and Woman Suffrage Scholarship." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 2 (2), 321-340.
- Dubinsky, Karen, Ruth Frager, Franca Iacovetta, Lynne Marks, Janice Newton, Carolyn Strange, Mariana Valverde, Cynthia Wright. (1992). "Introduction."

- In Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde, (Eds.) *Gender Conflicts: New Essays on Women's History* (pp. xi-xxi). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Dubinsky, Karen and Lynne Marks. (Fall 1995/Spring 1996). "Beyond Purity: A Response to Sangster." *left history* 3 (2) and 4 (1), 205-220.
- DuBois, Ellen Carol. (1978). *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Dumont, Micheline. (2000). "Can National History Include a Feminist Reflection on History?" *Journal of Canadian Studies* 35 (2), 80-94.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara and Deirdre English. (1978). *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women*. New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday.
- Eley, Geoff. (1992). "Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century." In Craig Calhoun, (Ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (pp. 289-339). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Elshtain, Jean Bethke. (1981). *Public Man, Private Woman*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa and Sheller, Mimi. (1999). "Publics in History." *Theory and Society* 28 (1), 145-197.
- Enstad, Nan. (1999). *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Errington, Jane. (1988). "Pioneers and Suffragists." In Sandra Burt, Lorraine Code and Lindsay Dorney, (Eds.) *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada* (pp. 51-79). Toronto: McLelland and Stewart.
- Felski, Rita. (1989). *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Forbes, Ernest. (1985). "The Ideas of Carol Bacchi and The Suffragists of Halifax: A Review Essay on *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918*." *Atlantis* 10 (2), 119-126.

- Fragar, Ruth. (1992). "Class, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Eaton Strikes in 1912 and 1934." In Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde, (Eds.) *Gender Conflicts: New Essays on Women's History* (pp. 189-228). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Fraser, Nancy. (1989). "Struggle Over Needs: Outline of a Socialist-Feminist Critical Theory of Late Capitalist Political Culture." Chapter 8 in *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- . (1992). "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." In Craig Calhoun, (ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (pp. 109-142). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- . (1995). "What's Critical About Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender." In Johanna Meehan, (ed.) *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse* (pp. 21-55). New York and London: Routledge.
- Gasher, Mike. (1997). "From Sacred Cows to White Elephants: Cultural Policy Under Siege." In Joy Cohnstaedt and Yves Frenette, (eds.) *Canadian Cultures and Globalization/Cultures canadiennes et mondialisation* (pp.13-39). Montreal: Association for Canadian Studies.
- Geller, Gloria. (1976). "The Wartime Elections Act of 1917 and the Canadian Women's Movement." *Atlantis* 2 (1), 88-106.
- Gerson, Carol (1989). *A Purer Taste: The Writing and Reading of Fiction in English in Nineteenth Century Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Gleason, Mona. (1998). "‘They have a bad effect’: Crime Comics, Parliament, and the Hegemony of the Middle Class in Postwar Canada." In John A. Lent, (Ed.) *Pulp Demons: International Dimensions of the Postwar Anti-Comics Campaigns* (pp. 129-154). Cranberry: Associated University Presses.
- Griffiths, N.E.S. (1993). *The Splendid Vision: Centennial History of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Ottawa: Carleton University Press.
- Ginzberg, Lori. (1990). *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States*. New Have: Yale University Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen. (1974) "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)." *New German Critique* 1 (4), 49-55.

- . (1984). *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. Thomas McCarthy, trans. Boston: Beacon Press.
- . (1987). *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume Two: System and Lifeworld: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Thomas McCarthy, trans. Boston: Beacon Press.
- . (1989). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Boston: MIT Press.
- . (1992). "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere." In Craig Calhoun, (ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (pp. 421-461). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- . (1996). *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*. Wilhelm Rehg, trans. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Haarsager, Sandra. (1997). *Organized Womanhood: Cultural Politics in the Pacific Northwest, 1840-1920*. Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Hall, Nancy. (1987). "The Professionalisation of Women Workers in the Methodist, Presbyterian, and United Churches of Canada." In Mary Kinnear, (Ed.) *First Days, Fighting Days: Women in Manitoba History* (pp. 120-133). University of Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre.
- Henderson, Jennifer. (2003). *Settler Feminism and Race-Making in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Hunt, Alan. (1999). *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Iacovetta, Franca and Linda Kealey. (Fall 1995/Spring 1996). "Women's History, Gender History and Debating Dichotomies." *left history* 3 (2) and 4 (1), 221-237.
- Kealey, Linda. (1979). "Introduction." In Linda Kealey (Ed.) *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s* (pp. 1-14). Toronto: The Women's Press.
- (Ed.). (1979). *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s*. Toronto: The Women's Press.

- Keane, John. (1984). *Public Life and Late Capitalism: Toward a Socialist Theory of Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kerber, Linda K. (1988). "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History." *The Journal of American History* 75 (1), 9-39.
- Kinnear, Mary. (1995). *In Subordination: Professional Women, 1870-1970*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Koven, Seth and Sonya Michel. (1990). "Womanly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, 1880-1920." *American Historical Review* 95 (4), 1076-1108.
- Kowal, Donna M. (2000). "One Cause, Two Paths: Militant vs. Adjustive Strategies in the British and American Women's Suffrage Movements." *Communication Quarterly* 48 (3), 240-255.
- Kraditor, Aileen. (1971). *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Landes, Joan B. (1988). *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- . (1995). "The Public and The Private Sphere: A Feminist Reconsideration." In Johanna Meehan, (ed.) *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse* (pp. 91-116). New York: Routledge.
- Lara, Maria Pia. (1998). *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in the Public Sphere*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lavigne, Marie, Yolande Pinard and Jennifer Stoddart. (1979). "The Fédération Nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste and the Women's Movement in Quebec." In Linda Kealey, (Ed.) *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s* (pp. 71-87). Toronto: The Women's Press.
- Little, Margaret Hillyard. (1998). *No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit: The Moral Regulation of Single Mothers in Ontario, 1920-1997*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Mackey, Eva. (2002). *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

- McCarthy, Thomas. (1984). "Translator's Introduction." *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume Two: System and Lifeworld: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Thomas McCarthy, trans. Boston: Beacon Press.
- McClung, Nellie. (1972 [1915]). *In Times Like These*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- McKillop, A.B. (1994). *Matters of Mind: The University in Ontario, 1791-1951*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- McLaughlin, Lisa. (1993). "Feminism, the Public Sphere, Media and Democracy." *Media, Culture and Society* 15, 599-620.
- McPherson, Kathryn, Cecilia Morgan, Nancy M. Forestell. (1999). "Introduction: Conceptualizing Canada's Gendered Pasts." In Kathryn McPherson, Cecilia Morgan, Nancy M. Forestell, (Eds.) *Gendered Pasts: Historical Essays in Femininity and Masculinity in Canada* (pp. 1-11). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mitchinson, Wendy. (1979). "The WCTU: For God, Home and Native Land: A Study in 19th Century Feminism." In Linda Kealey, (Ed.). *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s* (pp. 151-167). Toronto: The Women's Press.
- . (1987). "Early Women's Organizations and Social Reform: Prelude to the Welfare State." In Allan Moscovitch and Jim Albert, (eds.) *The 'Benevolent' State: The Growth of Welfare in Canada* (pp. 77-92). Toronto: Garamond Press.
- Moscovitch, Allan and Jim Albert, (Eds.). (1987). *The 'Benevolent' State: The Growth of Welfare in Canada*. Toronto: Garamond Press.
- Morrison, T. R. (1976). "'Their Proper Sphere' Feminism, The Family, and Child-Centered Social Reform in Ontario, 1875-1900." *Ontario History* 68 (1 & 2), 45-64, 65-74.
- Murolo, Priscilla. (1997). *The Common Ground of Womanhood: Class, Gender and Working Girls' Clubs, 1884-1928*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Newton, Janice. (1995). *The Feminist Challenge to the Canadian Left, 1900-1918*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Offen, Karen. (1988). "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14 (1), 119-157.

- O'Neill, William. (1969). *Everyone Was Brave: A History of Feminism in America*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books.
- Parr, Joy. (1995). "Gender History and Historical Practice." *Canadian Historical Review* 76 (3), 354-376.
- Pateman, Carole. (1983). "Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy." In Stanley I. Benn and Gerald F. Gaus, (Eds.) *Public and Private in Social Life* (pp. 281-303). London and Canberra: Croom Helm.
- . (1992). "Equality, Difference, Subordination: The Politics of Motherhood and Women's Citizenship." In Gisela Bock and Susan James, (Eds.) *Beyond Equality and Difference: Citizenship, Feminist Politics and Female Subjectivity* (pp. 17-31). London and New York: Routledge.
- Pedersen, Diana. (1983). "The Scientific Training of Mothers': The Campaign for Domestic Science in Ontario Schools, 1890-1913." In Richard A. Jarrell and Arnold E. Roos, (Eds.) *Critical Issues in the History of Canadian Science, Technology and Medicine* (pp. 178-194). Thornhill and Ottawa: HSTC Publications.
- Peiss, Kathy. (1991). "Going Public: Women in Nineteenth-Century Cultural History." *American Literary History* 3, 817-828.
- Prentice, Alison, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, Wendy Mitchinson, Naomi Black. (1988). *Canadian Women: A History*. Toronto: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.
- Press, Andrea L. (1989). "The Ongoing Feminist Revolution." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6 (2), 196-202.
- . (2000). "Recent Developments in Feminist Communication Theory: Difference, Public Sphere, Body and Technology." In James Curran and Michael Gurevitch, (Eds.) *Mass Media and Society*, Third Edition (pp. 27-43). London: Arnold.
- Prokhovnik, Raia. (1998). "Public and Private Citizenship: From Gender Invisibility to Feminist Inclusiveness." *Feminist Review* 60, 84-104.
- Rakow, Lana F. (1986). "Rethinking Gender Research in Communication." *Journal of Communication* 36 (4), 11-26.
- Reiger, Kerreen. (1987). "All but the Kitchen Sink: On the Significance of Domestic Science and the Silence of Social Theory." *Theory and Society* 16 (4), 497-526.

- Riley, Barbara. (1984). "Six Saucepans to One: Domestic Science vs. the Home in British Columbia, 1900-1930." In Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdro, (Eds.) *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women's Work in British Columbia* (pp. 159-181). Victoria: Camosun College.
- Riley, Denise. (1988). *'Am I That Name?' Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Roberts, Wayne. (1979) "Rocking the Cradle for the World: The New Woman and Maternal Feminism, 1877-1914". In Linda Kealey, (ed.) *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s* (pp. 15-45). Toronto: Women's Press.
- Ruddick, Sara. (1980). "Maternal Thinking." *Feminist Studies* 6 (2), 342-367.
- Ryan, Mary P. (1990). *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- . (1992) "Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth Century America." In Craig Calhoun, (ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (pp. 259-288). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Saidak, Patricia. (1986). "Home Economics as an Academic Science." In *Resources for Feminist Research* 15 (3), 49-51.
- Sangster, Joan. (Spring/Summer 1995). "Beyond Dichotomies: Re-Assessing Gender History and Women's History in Canada." *left history* 3 (1), 109-121.
- Saunders, Eileen. (2001). "Good Kids/Bad Kids: What's a Culture to Do?" In Paul Attallah and Leslie Regan Shade, (Eds.) *Mediascapes: New Patterns in Canadian Communication* (pp. 136-157). Scarborough: Nelson.
- Saywell, John T. (1960). *The Canadian Journal of Lady Aberdeen, 1893-1898*. Toronto: The Chaplain Society.
- Scott, Anne Firor. (1991). *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Scott, Joan W. (1988a). "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis." In *Gender and the Politics of History* (pp. 28-50). New York: Columbia University Press.

- . (1988b). "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism". *Feminist Studies* 14 (1), 33-49.
- Shaw, Rosa L. (1957). *Proud Heritage: A History of the National Council of Women of Canada*. Toronto: The Ryerson Press.
- Sklar, Kathryn Kish. (2000). "Women as Good Citizens, 1830-1920." *The Communication Review* 4 (1), 55-64.
- Snell, James. (2003). *Macdonald Institute: Remembering the Past, Embracing the Future*. Toronto: The Dundurn Group.
- Spigel, Lynn. (1998) "Seducing the Innocent: Childhood and Television in Postwar America. In Henry Jenkins, (Ed.) *The Children's Culture Reader*, (pp. 110-135). New York: New York University Press.
- Stamp, Robert M. (1977). "Teaching Girls their 'God Given Place in Life': The Introduction of Home Economics in the Schools." *Atlantis* 2 (2), 18-34.
- Strange, Carolyn. (1995). *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Strong-Boag, Veronica. (1972). "Introduction." In *In Times Like These*. Originally published, 1915. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- . (1976). *The Parliament of Women: The National Council of Women of Canada, 1893-1929*. National Museum of Man Mercury Series. Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, History Division, Paper Number 18.
- . (1977). "'Setting the Stage': National Organization and the Women's Movement in the Late 19th Century." In Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice, (Eds.). *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History* (pp. 87-103). Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.
- . (1979). "Canada's Women Doctors: Feminism Constrained." In Linda Kealey, (Ed.). *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s* (pp. 109-129). Toronto: The Women's Press.
- Taylor, Charles. (1995). "Liberal Politics and the Public Sphere." In *Philosophical Arguments*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Thorpe, Wendy Lizbeth. (1972). *Lady Aberdeen and the National Council of Women of Canada: A Study of a Social Reformer in Canada, 1893 to 1898*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Queen's University.

- Turnbull, Annmarie. (1994). "An Isolated Missionary: the Domestic Subjects Teacher in England, 1870-1914." *Women's History Review* 3 (1), 81-100.
- Valverde, Mariana. (1991). *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.
- . (1992). "‘When the Mother of the Race is Free’: Race, Reproduction, and Sexuality in First-Wave Feminism." In Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde, (Eds.) *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History* (pp. 3-26). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- . (1994). "Moral Capital." *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 9 (1), 213-233.
- van Zoonen, Liesbet. (1995). *Feminist Media Studies*. London: Sage Publications.
- Vickers, Jill. (2000). "Feminisms and Nationalisms in English Canada." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 35 (2), 128-148.
- and Micheline de Sève. (2000). "Introduction." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 35 (2), 5-25.
- Walkowitz, Judith. (1992). *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Warner, Michael. (1990). *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Warnke, Georgia. (1995). "Discourse Ethics and Feminist Dilemmas of Difference." In Johanna Meehan, (ed.) *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse* (pp. 247-261). New York and London: Routledge.
- Weigley, Emma Seifrit. (1974). "It Might have been Euthenics: The Lake Placid Conferences and the Home Economics Movement." *American Quarterly* 26 (1), 79-96.
- Wilson, S. Craig. (1998 ). "‘Our Common Enemy’: Censorship Campaigns of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union and the National Council of Women of Canada." *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 10 (2), 438-479.

- Wilton, Shauna. (2000). "Manitoba Women Nurturing the Nation: The Manitoba IODE and Maternal Nationalism, 1913-1920." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 35 (2), 149-165.
- Wright, Robert. (2001). *Hip and Trivial: Youth Culture, Book Publishing and the Greying of Canadian Nationalism*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc.
- Young, Iris Marion. (1987). "Impartiality and the Civic Public: Some Implications of Feminist Critiques of Moral and Political Theory." In Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell, (Eds.) *Feminism as Critique: Essays on the Politics of Gender in Late-Capitalist Societies* (pp. 56-76). Cambridge: Polity Press.

### Web Sites

- Collections Canada. Accessed online at  
<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/2/12/h12-403-e.htm>
- Nova Scotia Action Committee on the Status of Women (NSACSW).  
"Foremothers in Equality: Some Early Nova Scotia Suffragists." Accessed online at <http://www.gov.nc.ca/staw/NS4MOTHR.htm>.