Constitutive Rhetoric as an Aspect of Audience Design: The Public Texts of Canadian Suffragists

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Abstract

This article offers a way of using the theory of audience design—how speakers position different audience groups as main addressees, overhearers, or bystanders—for written discourse. It focuses on main addressees, that is, those audience members who are expected to participate in and respond to a speaker's utterances. The text samples are articles, letters, and editorials on women's suffrage that were published between 1909 and 1912 in Canadian periodicals. In particular, the author analyzes noun phrases with which suffrage-skeptical women are addressed, relying on the theory of constitutive rhetoric to highlight the interpellative force with which the audience design of this public political debate operates.

A central concern of rhetorical analysis is how writers attempt to make their readers act in the world—a process traditionally thought of as persuasion. Interest in this connection between speech and action has led to a recognition of speech itself as a kind of action. In that sense, the shift from a text to its

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response is one from one kind of action to another. Thus, a text constitutes not only a form of action but also an anticipation of further action. Filled with such anticipation, texts attempt to shape the response they will receive; they do so by interpellating their readers. Within the study of spoken discourse, it is audience design analysis that studies how speech posits these ideas about its audience. As Clark (1992) suggested, audience design comprises the stylistic features by which speakers design their utterances for particular audiences as well as design audiences by means of their utterances. These features include how speakers rely on shared knowledge with or deliberately disclose or conceal something from members of their audience. A study of audience design (as distinct from a study of audience) is thus interested in the way in which texts imagine and situate different audience constituents and how they expect different audience groups to react in response. Previous research on this particular idea of audience design has focused almost exclusively on oral discourse. My aim in this article is to make the theory of audience design useful for the study of written discourse and thus to challenge our understanding of persuasion.

The focus of this discussion will be the texts that the Canadian suffrage movement produced at the beginning of the 20th century. At the heart of my interest in audience design and suffrage speech is the question of how public utterances aim to affect social and political change by imagining different groups of listeners and readers and calling them to action in different ways. Canadian suffrage discourse thus functions as an example of the kind of writing in which rhetorical study is deeply invested: a public debate that has social and legal change as its goal. It is also a fruitful case for the study of audience design. Because Canadian suffrage writing was almost exclusively published in regular newspapers and magazines, Canadian suffrage articles were circulated among a general audience. As a result, suffrage writers had to consider a variety of readers who had varying views on suffrage. Within this arena of newspaper publishing, suffrage writers sometimes addressed other suffragists directly by giving instructions and campaign suggestions. But they also used other means of subject positioning, for instance when imagining the identities of women who were not yet suffragists or when speaking of Canadian politicians and their possible support for suffrage. I highlight the way in which Canadian suffragists imagined—how they constituted—the audience group of the privileged "idle woman" or "gentle lady." One of the reasons why this imagined readership of "gentle ladies" played such a prominent role for Canadian suffrage writing is that suffragists found it easy to bring their own moral and cultural capital to bear on this audience group.

Materials Surveyed

As in most Western countries, the suffrage movement in Canada was a diversified phenomenon in which different approaches to and ideas about social reform, political organization, styles of leadership, and women's role in society were represented. Throughout its history—most of its activities took place between the 1880s and the 1910s—the Canadian suffrage movement experienced often increasing but at times also waning support from different groups of society (see Bacchi, 1983; Cleverdon, 1950). Suffrage activities differed from province to province and town to town depending on how local activists chose to organize themselves and relate their work to other issues of social reform (including temperance, labor, or charity movements). Despite this variety of approaches, one of the features that is repeatedly mentioned as typical for the movement as a whole is that it appeared to be quite a conservative campaign in contrast to some of the more spectacular activities of British and American suffragists.[1] The relative absence of spectacular performances—of vocal and public advertisements, demonstrations, and protests—and also the lack of documentation of the public displays that did take place, draw our attention to the written discussions that have survived in archived print sources. Canadian suffragists' work is, therefore, best documented in the discussions that magazines, local and provincial newspapers, and women's pages in these publications conducted in tandem with their readers. It is these discussions that form the primary material for my analysis of audience design.

I focused my search on five periodicals from across the country: *The World* and *The Globe* from Toronto, the *Manitoba Free Press* and *Grain Growers' Guide* from Winnipeg, and *The Champion* from Victoria. These periodicals were prosuffrage at the time. I primarily surveyed the periodicals published between 1909 and 1912, years during which the Canadian discussion of women's suffrage was carried out most intensely. I selected articles that supported the movement for suffrage and searched these articles for suggestions of how the suffrage campaign was to be conducted and what work needed to be done in order to bring about the necessary legal change. In particular, I focused on the parts of the text which implied that or explicated how audience members should act in order to further the cause of suffrage. In addition to editorials, columns, and letters from these periodicals I also considered texts published elsewhere that have become prominent for our understanding of the Canadian suffrage discussions, including Leathes'(1914) essay in *University Magazine* and McClung's 1915 manifesto, *In Times Like These*. I found that my text samples make claims about a range of specifically

named audience groups—including provincial politicians, husbands, and suffrage organizers. However, in this analysis I attend to only one particular audience group, suffrage-skeptical women. As my discussion of constitutive rhetoric will show, I do so because this audience group highlights the ideological force that is inherent in the constitution of audience groups.

Audience Design in Canadian Suffrage Texts

Sometimes Canadian suffrage writers turned quite imperatively toward their imagined audiences by instructing them in direct and specific ways about how to act politically. For instance, J. E. Frith ends a letter to the *Grain Growers' Guide* by exclaiming in an optimistic tone: "*Out with petitions* [italics added] and it will surprise the world what Canada can and will do for the promotion of the fair and lovely of this progressive country" (p. 8). A few days later, in August 1912, another letter writer, calling herself Progress, reiterates the same feeling partly in response to Frith's letter:

> I believe there are thousands of women in the three Prairie Provinces who are in favor of woman's suffrage and I feel sure they will be only too pleased to sign a petition once it gets started. So *out with petitions* and *let us have them all ready* [italics added] to present to our legislators when Parliament assembles next fall. (p. 12)

These are just two of many examples of the use of imperative expressions in suffragists' writing. The audience design of these imperatives might seem obvious: They are aimed directly at other suffragists—often at suffragists who are assumed to be key organizers—to offer them suggestions on how to conduct the political campaign. But such seemingly direct imperatives in fact imply a more complex notion of audience relations. Frith's and Progress's letters are not personal letters to suffrage organizers asking them to please send out copies of petitions. They are public letters sent, in Frith's case, to the general editor of the news magazine of the prairie grain growers' associations, and in Progress's case, to the editor of the women's page of that same publication. These letters were not directly addressed at any one suffrage organizer, and so they offered their imperatives for uptake by any one of the *Grain Growers' Guide*'s readers. They also presented themselves to be overheard by the other readers, that majority which would not feel directly addressed by the call to send out petitions, a majority that was made witness to the call.

Given the presence of these overhearers, Frith and Progress's request for more petitions seems anything but direct. One might wonder whether these letter writers were really and practically committed to getting more petitions on the way because one can imagine more successful, more direct means to accomplish that. It seems that Frith and Progress were more interested in *talking about* petitions, and *being heard* talking about them, than in helping suffrage organizers with the demanding work of wording petitions, circulating and advertising them, collecting and tallying the results, and organizing meetings to present the results to politicians. Clearly, even the audience design of such seemingly direct calls for action as imperative expressions is a complex affair.

To capture some of this complexity, I rely on a tradition of audience design that can be traced from Goffman's (1981) work on footing through Clark's (1992) pragmatic linguistic theory of audience design to applications of notions of audience design in sociolinguistics (e.g., Bell, 1984; Ladegaard, 1995; Youssef, 1993) or cognitive psychology (e.g., Gibbs, Mueller, & Cox, 1988; Horton & Gerrig, 2005; Keysar, Barr, Balin, & Paek, 1998). However, my use of the notion of audience design differs from this tradition in one crucial aspect: While these authors study contemporary, spoken discourse, I am interested in using audience design as a form of analysis for historical, written text. I am adapting Goffman's and Clark's theories to written text partly because theories of written audience design are so rare (Park, 1982). My approach poses some challenges since Goffman's and Clark's ideas rely on a speaker's physical and deictic clues in distinguishing between such differently engaged audience groups as main addressees, overhearers, and eavesdroppers. Because audience members are not physically copresent in written, public discourse, we must rely almost exclusively on the text itself in finding clues as to how audience groups are imagined and positioned in relation to the writer. We can also take into account what we know historically about typical readers and respondents for the publication venues in question. The task of analyzing audience design of written texts involves understanding the context of publication as well as the constitutive dimension of written audience design in relationship to said readership (Park, 1982). My chief concern is to further theorize this relationship between a historical readership and the constitutive rhetoric of written text. The key claim that I import from pragmatic linguistic audience design is, among all the audience members, it is addressees (rather than side participants, bystanders, or overhearers) who are expected to participate in a conversation and act in response to what is being said.

In particular, my study identifies the imagined group of suffrage-skeptical, middle-class women as a recurring audience group in suffrage writing. I

argue that middle-class women who were not yet suffragists were the audience members who were most frequently called to action.[2] As Clark posits, one important feature that distinguishes addressees from overhearers is that addressees are meant to *act* in some way in response to the utterance, while overhearers are often recruited as witnesses to this suggestion or call for action. Clark accounts for these calls to action in terms of speech act theory (thus turning Goffman's discussion of footing into pragmatic linguistics), claiming that addressees are the recipients of the speaker's illocutionary act. It is to addressees that something is promised, an apology is given, or an assertion is being made, and it is they who can be expected to act on that promise, apology, or assertion.

Linguists often distinguish a boundary where language is translated into action, where analysis moves from a linguistic to an extralinguistic realm, and where, therefore, the study of linguistics stops. Rhetorical study, however, recognizes no such clear distinction and is instead concerned with language *as action*. But while for rhetoric the transition is not one between language and action, there is still a transition between one kind of action and another, between one person's speech and another's response. As Bitzer (1968) tells us in his theory about the rhetorical situation, how audiences are called to act in response to an utterance is a question with which rhetorical theory is centrally concerned. Nystrand (1982) also emphasized that rhetorical study differs from linguistics in that it thinks of audiences as "persons whom the speaker or writer hopes to influence" (p. 5). Most commonly, the way in which one person's text hopes to shape another person's response is thought of as persuasion. However, this study thinks of it as audience design: What are the subject positions that speakers create for their audiences and how do they relate these subject positions to the response and action they hope to espouse? The theory of constitutive rhetoric is particularly helpful in understanding the force with which audience positions become aligned with ideas about action.

Constitutive Rhetoric as Audience Design

Suffrage writers who worked for Canadian newspapers were in almost all cases employed not as political journalists but as editors of and columnists on women's pages. Their main audience on women's pages consisted of other women. As more Canadian women became active in the social reform movement, entered new professions, and earned their own money, the changing position of women was a constant topic of debate. Participants of

this debate were keenly aware that the social fabric as a whole was affected by the rise of female independence. As a result, the uncertainty surrounding women's positions was often used to arrange audience groups for rhetorical effect.

With the help of his theory of constitutive rhetoric, Charland (1987) explained how the rhetorical positioning of an audience constituency can have political force. Synthesizing Burke's notion of identification with Althusser's concept of interpellation, he suggests that Burke's identification can be likened to Althusser's interpellation that "always already" presumes the subject position of the addressee. Audiences do not exist apart from the speech by which they are to be persuaded. Charland criticizes the idea that audiences are free to chose, free to be persuaded. His case study centers on the emergence of the term *Québécois* in the late 1970s among supporters of Quebec sovereignty. While before the sovereignty movement there were Francophones and Anglophones, French- and Anglo-Canadians, now there was also the category of *Québécois*. Anyone who called others by that name imbued them with a desire for national independence. Charland suggests that when French Canadians were addressed as *Québécois* they were not persuaded to support sovereignty, but that the call for sovereignty was already inherent in the subject position circumscribed by *Québécois*. The rise of the term *Québécois* signifies the introduction and proliferation of a forceful and rebellious political position. The interpellative imposition of the term *Québécois* differs from persuasion in that to interpellate is not the same as providing arguments, evidence, and appeals. In the sense that persuasion implies that a choice is offered to the listener, constitutive rhetoric in fact leaves no room for persuasion. Charland's analysis demonstrates how public discourse at certain historical times creates subject positions that inescapably contain directives for action. Such political positioning is ideological because it tends to presuppose, rather than lay open, how it has been historically formed and on what values it is founded.

The Canadian suffrage movement did not have a focal term in the way that French Canadian nationalism did. Nevertheless, it is useful to think through Charland's concept and consider how women were addressed. The notions of "woman" and "mother" were contested terms between suffragists and anti-suffragists, not terms upon which suffragists could lay exclusive claim. To interpellate someone as a mother in early 20th century Canada did not have the same formative effect as to call someone *Québécois* in the late 1970s. As much as suffragists tried to recruit "mother" for their political purposes, anti-suffragists continually reminded them that women needed to remain attentive to their roles as mothers and wives.[3] They portrayed suffragism as a threat to

traditional womanhood and conjured the figure of the "mannish" or "unsexed" woman who is not a good mother or wife. Although the terms "woman" and "mother" were contested between suffragists and antisuffragists, to be inter-pellated as "woman" or "mother" was no less constitutive, creating its audience and shaping identities in the moment of address.

Because of its use by both pro- and anti-suffragists, the political action inherent in "woman" could be conservative or progressive; it could speak of traditional male authority as well as of an emerging female one.[4] After all, "woman" was not a term invented for the historic moment. But noun phrases that described certain types of women could be more responsive to the moment. Public discourse at the turn of the century frequently pondered the fate of new roles for women with the help of popular noun phrases. There was much discussion of, for instance, the business woman, the shop girl, the work-ing girl,[5] the factory girl, the unwed mother,[6] the club woman,[7] or the society woman. Constitutive rhetoric allows us to highlight the political trajectory with which these noun phrases come to be used at particular historical moments. Viewing these phrases as an integral part of audience design fur-ther clarifies their relation to the writer as well as to other audience groups. For instance, are they invoked as the main addressee and thus as the group that is meant to act on the writer's utterance, or are they invoked as side par-ticipants meant to witness a speaker's utterance? My differentiation of these categories is based on my rhetorical reading of audience design: Addressees are those audience constituents who are positioned for some kind of action. At that moment, all those other audience constituents who are also acknowl-edged as being present become side participants.

Both Goffman and Clark point out that audience relations can shift quite rapidly within an utterance. As speech occurs within a field of power rela-tions, it is also true that certain patterns of address tend to recur, that some audience groups are more often addressed directly by some speakers, while others are more often are cast as side participants or bystanders. Think, for instance, of the way in which students in a classroom tend to address the instructor even if they are responding to another student's utterance and even while they might intermittently turn to the other students (see also Ladegaard, 1995). My reading of Canadian suffrage texts indicates that among the named audience constituents, the "gentle" or "idle" ladies are a group that recurs frequently as an imagined addressee. Given that so many noun phrases in circulation were used by writers with very different agendas, the next ques-tion is how suffragists oriented their use of these terms, how they directed their evocation of these audience groups within the discursive landscape.

Establishing Audience Groups in Moral Terms

When these noun phrases were used to address audience groups, they derived their constitutive power from the moral and ideological beliefs that underwrote them. The term "platform woman," for instance, was a term that saw wide usage with the aim of discrediting the numerous English suffragists who were busy giving public speeches. The established meanings of phrases such "platform woman" exerted a strong influence on how women perceived their political possibilities. The constitutive force of this phrase was so strong that it led some women to revise their feminist ideas, as a sample article by Margaret Lonsdale shows. In Althusser's (1994) terms, Lonsdale demonstrates how women felt misrecognized when addressed as "platform women." In reaction to this misrecognition, some feminists suggested a toning down of feminist activism, while others attempted to resignify the term, as evidenced by a Canadian response to Lonsdale's article.

In a *Nineteenth Century* article, republished in the Canadian magazine *The Week*, Lonsdale (1884) catalogued what she saw as the drawbacks of women's increased public speaking. When women felt strongly toward a subject, she argued, they became "mentally warped" and narrow-minded about it; "calm judicial quality" was absent from their speech (p. 315). There was also "a gradual hardening of the countenance and of the external manner and address, indicating too surely the real repression going on within of much that is lovable and admirable in woman" (p. 315). Thus, the woman who frequently spoke in public turned into an unwomanly, a hardened woman. As such, she became the subject of many jokes and derogatory phrases; according to Lonsdale, "that dreadful woman" was actually one of the milder ones of these derogatory terms. Lonsdale believed that despite the prominence that was accorded to these platform women, they were "distasteful to the good sense and refined feeling of the majority" with the effect that "female influence in the world is degenerating" (p. 316). Would it not be more effective, she asks, to maximize the good influence women have in their small, private sphere rather than exert bad influence in public? Lonsdale was in favor of women exerting their influence on the world, but she was uncomfortable with the portrayal of publicly speaking women by antifeminists.

In a letter to the editor, Curzon (1884), then president of the Canadian Women's Suffrage Association, responds to Lonsdale's article by quoting a report on a recent suffrage meeting in Manchester. There, women speakers had pointed out that the kinds of actions that tended to discredit women

"varied with the century," and had Lonsdale lived in earlier days she might have been maligned even for publishing an article (p. 408). The work women did as public speakers was a result of a "desire which every woman ought to feel to throw her weight into the scale in the direction of righteousness and goodness" (p. 408). The suffragists at the Manchester meeting, and Curzon with them, attempted to turn around the image of platform women. They did so by emphasizing the honorable impulse behind women's public speaking and portraying them as at the cutting edge of social progress. Curzon suggests that the honorable impulse that drives platform women toward public speaking ought also to motivate other women to become public advocates of women's rights. In Burke's (1969) terms, Curzon's letter attempts to turn a dyslogistic term into a eulogistic one—both types being value-laden terms that state an argument rather than making it. Such terms have the force of an assumption without appearing in the form of an assumption. Charland (1987) referred to this kind of discourse as ideological, as "always only pointing to the given, the natural, the already agreed upon" (p. 133). Suffrage discourse that refers to platform women, working girls, or society women is also imbued with eulogistic and dyslogistic "tonalities," as Burke calls them (p. 98).

The use of noun phrases such as "the platform woman" was always underlined with moral concerns and political purposes. In fact, noun phrases could be created exclusively for outlining the moral rather than political or professional dimensions of female identity—witness Lonsdale's example of the "dreadful women." Canadian satirist Stephen Leacock (1914), who was an outspoken antisuffragist, also described female reformers as belonging to the class of "the Awful Woman," an "old maid" with spectacles who preaches the doctrine of woman's rights. The "Awful Woman" is not a phenomenon, claims Leacock, but is descended from the "Roman sibyls," the "medieval witch," and the "English scold" (p. 8). Like other antisuffragists, he categorizes the suffrage activist not by her political arguments but by disparaging her character. He alleges that because she could not find a husband, likely because she is too argumentative, she spends her time rousing other women into politics. By capitalizing and repeating the phrase "the Awful Woman," Leacock signals that such women are alike and form a class of their own and that their identity is inherently detestable.

Leacock's satirical description and his reasoning that suffragists lack husbands is not the most hostile example. The Colonel (1910) of *Saturday Night* makes a similar argument, speaking about English militant suffragettes with much malice:

> Absurdly lenient treatment for this gang of female rowdies has unquestionably much to do with their persistency. Six months hard labor, with

a double sentence for a second offence would probably clear the London atmosphere in a wonderfully short time. . . .

Britain's public men have an ample share of responsibilities as it is without being obliged to spend a goodly portion of their valuable time dodging a lot of turbulent, crotchety, peevish old cats.

The chief difficulty appears to be that these fighting suffragettes have not a sufficient number of home ties and home interests. A good lusty family each, with a house to look after, would do wonders toward soothing the average rock-throwing female rowdy that is now the *bete noire* of English political life. (p. 1)

The Colonel's tirade employs the term "female rowdy" in much the same, dyslogistic way as Leacock uses the "Awful Woman."[8]

The coining of noun phrases in suffrage and antisuffrage texts occurred in parallel to the social categorizations in governmental and philanthropic policies. For example, Murray (2004) has traced the emergence of the category of the "unwed mother" among social reformers in turn-of-the-century Toronto. She finds that unwed mothers did by no means present a prominent and visible social problem. Rather, social workers and religious leaders actively created this social classification because unwed mothers could so easily be positioned as open to reform. Unwed mothers were "ideal" deviant subjects for social reformers' efforts to direct them toward "appropriate" behavior. As a result, the phrase "unwed mother" came to contain directives for women's behavior and could be used to interpellate them according to the ideals of state and nation. Murray's study serves as a useful illustration that an audience group—in this case an audience that is the object of social reform initiatives—does not preexist the social reform discourse but is constituted through its repeated utterances. Charland (1987) called this the ideological trick of constitutive rhetoric: presenting that which is most rhetorical—the existence of a particular yet imagined group of people—as extrarhetorical, as preexisting the moment of address. Murray's study shows that patterns of audience design have the power to shape social and governmental policies.

In the tradition of social reformers, suffragists addressed women by distinguishing types of female identities, by placing them within the social and moral fabric, and thus orienting them toward a desired future action. The addressees of their texts are not always given explicit instructions for action but rather expectations for action arise from the subject positions to which audiences are called. In fact, the act of interpellating addressees is often the more significant task than the actions that are expected to follow. As Valverde (1994) suggested, moral reform movements often place less emphasis on acts of moral behavior and more emphasis on subjectivities that are considered

inherently moral. Correct actions are assumed to follow from these subjec-
tivities, but the subjectivity is more potent than the behavior because it also
produces cultural capital.

Suffragists Address the "Idle Woman"

Women who were not yet suffragists were occasionally interpellated as
occupying an immoral position with the aim of compelling them to identify
instead with what was implied to be a more moral and politically potent
identity. McClung (1915/1972), a prominent Canadian suffrage organizer,
social reform advocate, and author of popular fiction, mocks the arguments of
antisuffragist women as "anemic and bloodless" with an "indefinable sick-
headache, kimona, breakfast-in-bed quality . . . that repels the strong and
healthy" (p. 63). Such a woman is a "gentle lady" who does not like to hear
"distressing things" and who responds to the plight of female factory work-
ers with an exclamation such as this one:

> Now, please do not tell me about how these ready-to-wear garments are
> made, because I do not wish to know. The last time I heard a woman
> talk about the temptation of factory girls, my head ached all evening
> and I could not sleep. (p. 63)

The term "lady" itself was falling from favor and was increasingly used to
criticize the women so addressed (see Madame, 1910; McMaster, 2002).
McClung characterizes the "gentleness" of privileged women as a self-
interested avoidance of caring for the lives of less privileged women. In the
Toronto *Globe,* a letter writer signing with Elizabeth (1910) likewise speculates
that antisuffragists belong to the "well-fed, well-clothed, well-protected
class who do not care to be roused out of their comfortable homes to lend a
helping hand to their less fortunate sisters who have to go out into the world
to earn their bread" (p. 12).

McClung and the letter writer Elizabeth criticize an upper-class attitude
among privileged women. As these women are portrayed as idle and unhealthy,
they are also shown to diverge from the notion of a more hardy Canadian
womanhood, the ideal being a vigorous "mother of the race." For instance,
McClung explains that the suffrage movement, misunderstood and maligned
as it often was, represented in fact "a spiritual revival of the best instincts of
womanhood—the instinct to serve and save the race" (p. 66). In contrast, the
"anti-suffrage attitude" among some women was in McClung's view "not so
much a belief as a disease" (p. 62). Suffragists' dyslogistic noun phrases for

privileged and socially unconcerned women thus work as a contrast to their eulogistic self-characterization as maternally concerned female activists. The dyslogistic address of not-yet-suffragist women is, therefore, also a moment of audience design in which suffragists characterize themselves by selectively emphasizing certain features of their audience members.

Distaste for privileged women was often exhibited with the aim of obligating these women to take more interest in politics and women's issues. In 1912, *The Champion*, the monthly magazine of the Political Equality League of Victoria, published a report of a study club devoted to "free and full discussion of various topics of interest to the 'new woman'" ("The Study Club," 1912, p. 6). That day the club was to debate "Fundamental Reasons for the Enfranchisement of Women" and judging by the written report, the concept of "The Mother of the Race" took center stage among these fundamental reasons. By the very nature of motherhood, the report states, "Racial progress and development is largely in the hands of women," and, therefore, the rights and privileges of citizenship should also be in the hands of women. The report asks:

> Look at the people as you go down the street and ask, isn't there room for improvement in the human specimens you meet? What is the reason for the manifest imperfections? What is woman going to do about it? What can she do while her sex means her subjection? (p. 6)

These improvements in "racial health" are described as something that women can diagnose more clearly than men, and for which women bear unique responsibility: "We must go forward as women or racial progression must cease, for we are the mould in which the future race is cast" (p. 7). The hailed "racial progression" is thought to be thwarted by conditions such as "a double standard of morality, drink and disease, enforced maternity, sickly and imperfect children, sweated labour, man-made standards for women" (p. 7). The relationship between men and women as this report lays it out is more oppositional than in most Canadian suffrage texts: "We women have got to take the broader view—the step forward," says the article, "We are the *Mother of the Race, not the subject of the man*" (p. 7, emphasis in original).

Despite the juxtaposition to men, the unified "we" among women as "mothers of the race" comes with divisions that are used to interpellate different audience groups. For instance, the article distinguishes between women who have and who have not taken on the feminist task. When posing the question of what a woman can do while she is in subjection, the report offers that "first of all, before she can do anything, she must wake up to the

responsibilities of her position, and become conscious of her own ignorance and lack of development" (p. 6). This is a familiar feature of the audience design of political speech: the evocation of a political "we" coincides with a division between those who are already behind an idea and those who should be. Privileged women who are not yet suffragists are at the same time in a position of great possibility and in a state of undeveloped thinking. McClung posits that it is the "comfortable and happily married woman—the woman who has a good man between her and her world, who has not the saving privilege of having to work" who "has the greatest temptation not to think at all" (p. 34). In such a state, a "sort of fatty degeneration of conscience" takes place (p. 34). By not challenging their own thinking these women also do not fulfill their potential as caring "mothers of the race" within Canadian society. Such constitutive rhetoric around the suffrage-skeptical woman obfuscates the fact that vocal antisuffragists women were in most cases very educated and politically minded.[9] We must note, therefore, how well some suffragists managed to portray the act of thinking as, by default, a suffragist act.

Constitutive Rhetoric and Ideology

According to Charland, constitutive rhetoric does what rhetoric as persuasion cannot do. While rhetoric as persuasion requires an audience that is "already constituted with an identity and within an ideology," it has no way of accounting for this audience (p. 134). In contrast to persuasion, constitutive rhetoric illuminates how audiences are created in the moment of utterance and interpellated with the unspoken force of ideology. Together, the theories of constitutive rhetoric and audience design clarify also how utterances constitute a range of different audience positions, how thereby writers position themselves in relation to these audience groups, and how these groups are expected to act on the writer's utterance.

I have focused my analysis on an addressee group that recurs frequently in Canadian suffrage discourse. Suffragists' audience design hoped to compel these addressees—the middle- and upper-class women who were not yet suffragists—to political action by virtue of moral obligation and class authority. By relegating female suffrage skeptics to undesirable subject positions, suffragists could also reinterpret the notion of traditional womanhood in their own favor. In contrast to the languishing "gentle lady," McClung can thus describe her suffragist audience as unselfish and working toward a "revival of the best instincts of motherhood" (p. 66). Muriel (1910), another letter writer to the *Globe*, explains that the woman who wants the vote "is really the earnest woman with the mother-heart, ready to do and dare anything for her

family" (p. 12). In similar letters, suffragists are also called "thoughtful women," "true women," "earnest women," the "intelligent Canadian womanhood," "the most serious-minded of our women," and "good women." The audience design of Canadian suffrage discourse makes itself known most explicitly in noun phrases that are used to highlight the inherent morality of certain positions or denounce the immorality of others. Their readers are not meant to weigh arguments but to recognize the almost inescapable rightness of certain positions and the immorality of others. Charland notes that because of the presence of rightness we should be critical of the term persuasion—the language of rightness is not one of choices, and the audience of constitutive rhetoric is not free to be persuaded. The process instead is akin to a conversion that results in a recognition of this rightness.

As the subject positions proposed by social movements are always underlined by morality, the study of audience design in movement discourse always has to contend with this moral language. In addition, Canadian suffrage discourse was also a discourse that was particularly rich in moral appeals because it thrived in a society that was rife with debates about social and moral reform and because women's political role was so contested. Compared to Charland's example of the *peuple Québécois*, the constitutive rhetoric of Canadian suffragists is much less of a rallying cry.[10] Unlike French Canadian sovereigntists, suffragists did not necessarily hail suffrage skeptics as one of their own but rather as potential converts to suffragism. Suffrage rhetoric fashioned itself more as a careful moral positioning than a rebellious uprising. Compared to French Canadian sovereigntism, a different network of audience positions is required for a political movement that is so dependent on politicians' goodwill and the public perception of women. Most Canadian suffragists felt that they could not afford to engage in radical distinctions between supporters and enemies.[11] Unlike sovereigntists, whose aim is, after all, to govern their own country, suffragists needed to emphasize their willingness to cooperate in existing politics, even if that meant appeasing antisuffragist politicians.

Clearly, the moral parameters under which suffrage discourse functioned are inseparable from its audience design. The means of address in political texts greatly rely on the power of current ideologies and moral beliefs, or, in other words, on beliefs that are held with such conviction that they tend not to be made explicit. The power that ideology has in positioning audience members cannot be overemphasized; it thoroughly challenges the conception that persuasion functions primarily by means of argumentation. Current feminist research on suffrage would agree with this emphasis on ideology. In the past, feminist research attempted to distinguish historical feminist

politics from its moral parameters as a way to celebrate what was good about early feminism. Fiamengo (2002), for instance, thoroughly reviewed how the discussion of early Canadian feminism has shifted from a 1970s celebration of its egalitarian impulses to current debates about the role of its racism. In a landmark article, Valverde (1992) argued that the racism of Canadian feminists should not be viewed as an aberration but must be seen as an integral part of early feminism (see also Valverde, 1994).[12] Like Valverde, Devereux (2005) also suggested the language of morality and rightness cannot be divorced from the feminist claims of which it is part. In her study of Nellie McClung and eugenic feminism, she pushes the question further by asking,

> What does it mean to characterize eugenics in Canada as a movement "led" by feminists? And to concomitantly characterize first-wave feminism as a movement that is tainted and undermined by its involvement in the full spectrum of eugenical ideas, from birth control and the protection of mothers to the sterilization of the putatively "unfit?" (p. 16)

In Devereux's view, early feminism did not simply adopt eugenic argumentation from elsewhere, but was one of the driving forces behind imagining and circulating such argumentation. Under these circumstances the idea of moving today's feminism forward—and away from its earlier racist and eugenical ideas—is part of the problematic notion of progress so inherent in eugenics. The desire to dissociate current feminism from earlier racism is "itself an indication of the extent to which western feminism is still invested in a theory of upward social movement" (p. 140). The question for Devereux is not "How far have we come?" but "How has feminist ideology changed?" (p. 140).

What Devereux says about feminist analysis can also be said about analysis of written argumentation: Questions about ideology are not questions that current research can outgrow. Rather, ideology must continue to be central to our study of political address. In terms of audience design, Devereux's latter question could be rephrased as: What are the terms of rightness with which participants in public debates interpellate their audiences? Patterns of audience design thus reveal a landscape of changing terms of political interpellation. Importantly, an analysis of audience design shows changes in these terms not as a result of progress but as part of how audiences are constituted for different political moments, for different rhetorical situations.

Conclusion

This study has highlighted the "idle woman" or "gentle lady" as a recurring figure in the audience design of Canadian suffragists. In the process of constituting this group of addressees, suffragist writers emphasized these women's privileged status, their educational and financial resources, and their moral obligations. They did so in an attempt to compel this imagined group of women to participate in the suffrage campaign. Suffragists interpellated these imagined idle, middle- and upper-class women with the moral capital available to them, thus positioning them toward a favored political action: increased involvement in political activism for women's rights. This feature of Canadian suffrage audience design—the constituting of the audience group of suffrage-skeptical middle- and upper-class women—highlights the interpellative moral forces (rather than practices of persuasion) with which movement discourses operate.

My study of Canadian suffrage writing suggests that noun phrases such as the "gentle lady," the "unwed mother," or the "platform woman" are a key element in the audience design of public political debates. They are a way of imagining a group of people, of constituting subject positions that already circumscribe their political views and direct them toward particular political actions. To be clear, these groups are not always positioned as main addressees; they can just as well be side participants, overhearers, or bystanders. Those noun phrases that tend to recur, however, describe audience groups that are frequently imagined as main addressees for they are often voiced with the expectation of audience response. In the case of Canadian suffragists addressing middle- and upper-class women as "gentle" or "idle" ladies, the expected action was one of joining forces with political activists, of those women using their resources and time to participate in the movement for women's rights.

As I noted, the constitutive rhetoric that imagines and politically positions a key addressee is only one aspect of the audience design of social and political movements. Another crucial aspect that warrants further study is the importance of overhearers, the importance of those who are made to witness the address as well as the moral force of its constitutive rhetoric. The examples in this article are taken from public venues, newspapers, and magazines, where the writers knew that a variety of readers might overhear those calls directed at privileged women. In this particular case study, this means that further research needs to pay analytical attention to, for instance, the role of male overhearers, of politicians and decision makers when they are not directly addressed in the newspaper debates among female suffragists. What textual clues can we use to identify overhearers? What are some of the

patterns with which overhearers are figured in the discourse of social movements?

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Notes

1. There are also views that don't interpret this absence of spectacle as conservative. For instance, Dorland and Charland (2002) argued that the Canadian women's suffrage movement was by no means conservative and that in fact it was radical because it called for women's rights in a civil culture that, as they contend, did not conceive of the political subject as a bearer of rights. They say that, therefore, the emergence of women as political subjects is all the more remarkable and shows that despite Canada's conservatism "radicalism and impiety are possible, at least if advanced through deferral and irony" (p. 222).
2. Another group that warrants further study were the overhearing men—in particular, politicians—who were imagined to witness the debate.
3. For some prominent antisuffragist texts in Canada, see, for example, Smith (1874; 1890), Macphail (1910; 1914), and Leacock (1915).
4. Heilmann and Sanders (2006) argued that among the many things that British feminist and antifeminist writers of the Victorian period share is most prominently their preoccupation with "questions of femininity, each side laying claim to 'authentic' as opposed to the other camp's 'artificial', flawed, corrupted or unsexed femininity" (p. 289). They also provide evidence of the fluidity of the boundary between feminist and antifeminist positions—some Victorian woman writers invoked the woman rebel while distancing themselves from political demands while dedicated feminist writers at times embraced antifeminist positions.
5. To give a sample of Canadian articles on the working girl: *Busy Man's Magazine* (later renamed *Maclean's*) ran articles on, for instance, "Smoothing the Way of the Working Girl" (Austin, 1907), "Guarding the Interests of Our Working Girls" (Parker, 1908), and "As the Working Girl Sees It" (Westwood, 1908). For discussions of the working girl and the shop girl in Canadian literature, see McMaster (2002).

6. See Murray (2004) on the emergence of the category of the "unwed mother" in turn-of-the-century Toronto.

7. See Gere and Robbins (1996) on the notion of the club woman in the United States, how it differed between European- and African-American clubs, and how they developed models for literacy in their club publications.

8. See also Denison's (1910) measured response to The Colonel.

9. For a discussion of how much the key organizers of American antisuffrage organizations resembled suffragists in terms of class, education, and range of political activities, see, for instance, Camhi (1994), Jablonsky (1994), Green (1997), and Marshall (1997).

10. In their book on the discourse of law in Canadian civil culture, Dorland and Charland (2002) argued that the most remarkable contribution of Canadian suffragism to Canadian public discourse was in fact that it created woman as a political subject. They also suggest that this creation was different in the Canadian context because Canadian civil culture did not function on the basis of rights discourse and thus this avenue of constituting themselves as political subjects was not open to women.

11. See Thieme (2006) for a discussion of how Canadian suffragists were urged to proceed moderately and politely rather than radically and divisively.

12. Cohen (1996) makes a similar argument with regards to the American suffrage movement, describing it as pursuing an exclusive citizenship based on Whiteness, and, therefore, being nationalist and racist at the same time. Like Valverde, he challenges earlier studies which did not take this racism seriously enough and which attributed it instead to heightened emotions in a political moment or the pernicious ideological influence of White men.

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Bio

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