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## Opening Doors Wider



*Edited by Sylvia Bashevkin*

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**Opening Doors Wider**  
Women's Political Engagement  
in Canada



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# Abbreviations

ADQ	Action démocratique du Québec
BQ	Bloc Québécois
CAWI/IVTF	City for All Women Initiative/ Initiative: Une ville pour toutes les femmes
CES	Canadian Election Study
CEW	Committee for the Equality of Women
CMA	census metropolitan area
DGÉQ	Directeur général des élections du Québec
FPTP	first past the post
GBLT	gay, bisexual, lesbian, or transgendered
IULA	International Union of Local Authorities
MNA	member of the National Assembly
MPP	member of provincial parliament
NAC	National Action Committee on the Status of Women
NDP	New Democratic Party
NOIVMW	National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women
NZES	New Zealand Election Study
OWD	Ontario Women's Directorate
PC	Progressive Conservative
PLQ	Parti libéral du Québec
PQ	Parti Québécois
PR	proportional representation
RCSW	Royal Commission on the Status of Women
SMP	single-member plurality
VMIW	Visible Minority and Immigrant Women committee



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## Opening Doors Wider



# 1

## Introduction

*Sylvia Bashevkin*

From the days of the fur trade through the contemporary period, women have played important roles in the public life of Canada (Bashevkin 1993, ch. 1; Van Kirk 1980). Until approximately the 1970s, however, these contributions to civic engagement, including to local voluntary associations and formal political institutions such as parties, were generally overlooked, despite their significance to the growth of democratic values and practices.

After more than three decades of scholarship and activism designed to raise the profile of women's involvement, we fortunately have an opportunity to pose two crucial sets of questions. *First, are the doors to participation presently open wider than they were in the past?* What obstacles as well as possibilities face specific groups of female citizens, including immigrant women in Canada's major cities and rural residents living far from metropolitan centres of settlement? Have patterns of media coverage shifted to such a degree that women as a group, and individual female citizens, can expect to engage in community groups and party organizations on something approaching an even playing field?

*Second, how can these passageways be widened, both in terms of real-world participation and our scholarly understanding of public engagement?* What remedies have been proposed? Which ones have served to enhance women's involvement, and which have been less effective? What research directions need to be pursued in order to shed more light on barriers to participation and opportunities for meaningful involvement?

In setting forth these two main questions, we are guided by the literatures in history, political science, and women's studies that have thus far shaped the field. The emergence of second-wave women's movements during the late 1960s and the decades that followed directly influenced historical research, and feminist scholars in particular grew increasingly interested in women as public actors (Bacchi 1983; Kealey 1998; Kealey and Sangster 1989; Strong-Boag 1972). They posed important questions that had not been widely pursued by earlier generations of academics, most notably: Who were the

first-wave pioneers who pressed for the rights to vote and hold public office and to introduce major social policy reforms in the post-suffrage era? What ideas propelled their claims for each of these changes, and what blind spots characterized their outlooks on public engagement?

The literature that evolved in this area during the past thirty years has demonstrated the impact of progressivism on early feminism from the late nineteenth century onward, and it has shown how suffragist arguments were often closely intertwined with temperance, trade union, and anti-immigration streams in the same period. Historians who sought to uncover or recover the early interventions of women in Canadian public debates thus revealed the chances activists took to stake out their arguments, as well as the challenges many faced when they tried to reconcile their claims as white women who hailed from religious majority and colonial power backgrounds with the interests of other (notably immigrant and Aboriginal) women who lived in the country or were seeking to enter it. Historical research, in short, did far more than simply celebrate the efforts of first-wave feminism: at its best, this scholarly stream raised tough questions about the limits and blind spots of early activists.

In the discipline of political science, researchers began, in the early 1980s, to document the obstacles and openings available to women in mainstream institutions. Focusing for the most part on parties and legislatures, scholars interested in the intersections of gender and politics examined the relatively low numerical representation of women, especially in the upper echelons of these structures (Bashevkin 1985; Brodie 1985). One observation, made in 1985 and summarized in the phrase “the higher, the fewer,” continues to resonate because it identified the increasingly limited presence of women as one looked up the ladders of political parties, legislatures, cabinets, and public bureaucracies (Bashevkin 1985, ch. 3).

During the two subsequent decades, studies in this area charted the contours of female participation in mainstream political institutions, examined the causes of under-representation at different levels, and considered various formal and informal efforts to increase women’s engagement (Anderson 1991; Arscott and Trimble 1997; Newman and White 2006; Tremblay and Trimble 2003; Tremblay and Andrew 1998; Trimble and Arscott 2003). Not surprisingly, this literature paid particular attention to barriers to legislative involvement. It emphasized limited financial resources to pay for expensive nomination battles, discriminatory attitudes among party recruiters, socialization experiences that robbed women of necessary confidence and ambition, and distorted media treatment of women who entered public life as critical obstacles to enhanced participation. The remedies that were suggested included increased public funding of election costs, changes to Canada’s electoral system, and party quotas for women candidates – all of which had

the goal of moving women beyond the roughly 20 percent plateau of legislative representation that characterized the federal House of Commons and a number of provincial legislatures during this period.

This literature seems dated in many respects. On one level, it has generally ignored public engagement beyond the party and legislative environments, thus overlooking a wide array of important civic venues in which women participate. These include local community groups, feminist organizations, and other streams of activity outside official political organizations. On another level, this scholarship has also failed to probe the links between organized women's movement activism, broader demographic shifts in the country, and changes in mainstream political institutions (for one important exception, see Young 2000). It has not extensively probed, for example, how the decline of second-wave mobilization would likely shape legislative engagement or media portrayals. If feminism has waned as a social movement, then what has happened to feminist challenges to political institutions? Can women in top positions, including those holding cabinet office, operate as carriers of the movement's claims when the movements themselves appear dormant? How has the growing demographic diversity of Canada's cities, in particular, reverberated in terms of women's political engagement? Finally, few studies have systematically assessed the effectiveness of proposed remedies to female under-representation, including quotas for parliamentary candidates.

From the perspective of fundamental institutional change in Canada, the women and politics literature has also been relatively silent on questions of centralization, decentralization, and policy change within the federation. Created in 1867 as a quasi-federal system that bridged significant religious and regional differences, Canada has evolved over time in an increasingly differentiated and devolved direction. Particularly since the introduction of major structural reforms to federal social policy during the early 1990s, organized interests seeking to shape government decision making have faced a multiplication of access points and relevant actors – which creates an especially challenging scenario for groups with limited resources (see Bashevkin 2002).

The fact that provinces have enjoyed widened opportunities for policy experimentation, and that federal governments have systematically constrained their own abilities to limit this innovation, means that many of the Canada-wide solutions proposed by English Canadian feminism since the early 1970s may no longer be workable. In particular, the traditional preferences of many English Canadian women's groups for a strong federal state that would establish and enforce national standards across a variety of policy domains seems distinctly at odds with the reality of a highly devolved federation. Conversely, the focus since the 1970s of Quebec-based women's

groups on a strong provincial or, in some cases, sovereign regime based in Quebec City appears to have offered far greater leverage for feminist interests in that environment. In short, as more and more windows of opportunity opened at the sub-national level across Canada, it seemed that activists in Quebec were best placed to push them ajar.

Women's studies scholars have long been interested in the dynamics of second-wave feminist mobilization in Canada (Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail 1988; Carty 1993; Vickers, Rankin, and Appelle 1993; Wine and Ristock 1991). Yet, their contributions reflect a strong emphasis on societal rather than state-focused research questions. Just as the political science literature has tended to gloss over what is considered "non-political" engagement in community and social movement groups, women's studies research has often neglected more formal dimensions of participation, notably in parties and legislatures.

Among the most promising contributions to our understanding of the links between formal political and informal social movement engagement can be found in the work of Nadia Urbinati. A political theorist based at Columbia University, Urbinati views participation in state structures (including the electoral system, parties, bureaucracies, and legislatures) as being closely related to engagement in non-state venues such as women's organizations. She posits that citizens relate to democratic governments and government elites along a spectrum, or continuum, of sites that bridge what has traditionally been seen as a silo-like dichotomy between institutional participation, on one side, and social movement advocacy, on the other (Urbinati 2000, 2006). This conception permits us to see women's engagement with politics in Canada as being spread across multiple venues – from local, community-based, grassroots organizations to legislatures and cabinet tables.

Across these various sites, the dynamics of opening doors and of ensuring that both women and men pass through them may vary considerably. In some contexts, notably in the realm of contemporary electoral and party politics, *demand* for women candidates may eclipse the *supply* of willing participants. As Pippa Norris and Joni Lovenduski demonstrate with respect to British politics, voters may be well disposed to vote for women who run, and party recruiters may actively seek female nominees in promising seats, but these demand-side patterns will exert little real-world effect if few women choose to join parties, agree to stand as candidates, and contest elections (Norris and Lovenduski 1995, ch. 6).

In turn, supply-and-demand trends are closely related to the values, traditions, and practices of particular institutions. Within a single political system, some parties may be more welcoming than others towards women, Aboriginal people, or immigrants. In addition, local and community organizations may seem more porous to individuals from these backgrounds than



do provincial- or federal-level parties. These types of institutional openings and limitations have been theorized by scholars under the rubric of political opportunity structures, an approach that initially gained prominence with the publication, in 1989, of Joyce Gelb's comparative study of women's movements in the United States, Great Britain, and Sweden (Gelb 1989).

Since the 1980s, the rise of conservative political leaders in Canada and elsewhere has focused attention on how citizens can make successful political claims in any venue – given larger global shifts towards international trading regimes that highly privilege markets and devalue states. Many aspects of the rise of what is known as neoliberalism lead us to question long-held assumptions about political engagement. For example, should women as a group seek policy leverage via bureaucratic channels (and, specifically, the use of women-centred or femocrat strategies) if public servants hold little influence over decision making (see Bashevkin 2006; Chappell 2002; Lovenduski 2005; Malloy 2003)? As states retrench and reconfigure their budgetary commitments, how likely is it that critical advocacy organizations will obtain public financing? Will those groups be drawn towards service-provider roles for the state as resources for advocacy work come under threat (Bashevkin 1998, 2002)?

Although they address this bureaucratic dimension only indirectly, the chapters that follow take up the challenge to probe engagement across venues, and over time, in order to assess both the opportunities and challenges facing women's involvement, broadly defined.

### **Why Engagement Matters**

Why does women's participation matter to contemporary democracy? Scholars in this field often build on the work of political theorist Hanna Pitkin. Writing in the late 1960s, Pitkin (1967, 11) highlighted the distinction between what she termed descriptive or "standing for" representation – a demographic similarity between mass and elite – and substantive or "acting for" representation, which required a policy-based linkage between citizens and political leaders.

From the perspective of descriptive representation, women's presence as public actors confirms, while their absence disconfirms, the legitimacy of democratic practices. Institutions in which the percentages of female participants resemble those in the general public appear more politically credible than others in which proportions of women fall far short of those in the general population. Descriptive representation is also relevant at the level of political symbolism, since seeing significant numbers of women in public life suggests to observers, including small children, that females can contribute to society as engaged political actors. Women politicians, for example, can inspire young girls to consider legislative careers, shape cultural perceptions in such a way as to undermine stereotypes that promote the idea that

women do not belong in responsible positions, and erode traditional associations of men with public roles and women with private ones. Moreover, political organizations could benefit from even symbolic efforts to enhance the number of female participants, since such efforts would widen their recruitment base by drawing in diverse sources of new talent.

Pitkin's discussion foreshadowed a significant body of empirical research on the issue priorities of female politicians. This work, conducted primarily in North America and western Europe, reported that elected women were on average more liberal, and more committed to the policy claims of second-wave feminism, than their male counterparts. Studies of the substantive interventions of women legislators, for example, tended to support Pitkin's view of an important "acting for" dimension in political representation (Dodson 2006; Sawyer, Tremblay, and Trimble 2006, pt. 2).

In Canada, efforts to elect more women were often defended as a way to ensure greater substantive representation for women as an interest. Early research in this field offered empirical support for that position. Accounts of federal and provincial politics between the mid-1970s and early 1990s showed that, as more women legislators were elected and more women cabinet ministers were appointed, more pro-feminist policies were enacted at both levels. One of the highest percentages of women in a government caucus and cabinet was achieved in Ontario between 1990 and 1995. Premier Bob Rae's New Democratic Party (NDP) caucus included about twenty women (out of seventy-four members, or more than one-quarter), at least half of whom were active in second-wave feminist organizations (Burt and Lorenzin 1997, 209). As Lesley Byrne's study in this volume explores in greater detail, eleven NDP women were appointed to the Ontario provincial cabinet (out of twenty-six members, or 42.3 percent). The Rae government extended child care provision, increased funding for shelters for battered women, raised the minimum wage, strengthened pay equity laws, and legalized midwifery. Even though leading women's groups wanted more policy action of this type, the numbers-to-policy record in the Ontario NDP remained clear. No Ontario government before or after had as many women in caucus and cabinet positions, and no other government was as responsive to feminist groups on the policy side.

At the federal level, electing women to the House of Commons in the period before 1993 generally meant electing more NDP, Liberal, and Progressive Conservative (PC) women, most of whom were sympathetic towards the issue positions of second-wave feminism. As in other political systems, women's movement ideas generally overlapped with left (as opposed to right) political attitudes and with progressive (as opposed to conservative) party positions. As in other political systems, the beliefs of the women's movement were closely associated with left/right attitudes and with party identification, such that, not surprisingly, female NDP legislators tended to

be more pro-feminist in their views than females in the Liberal and PC parties. That being said, research consistently demonstrated that, before 1993, NDP, Liberal, and Progressive Conservative women MPs worked closely together on such issues as promoting the constitutional rights of women, ensuring open access to abortion services, preventing violence against women, and strengthening gun control legislation (Young 2000).

The ability to build all-party consensus among women, however, declined in 1993, following the arrival in the House of Commons of a right-wing, regionalist Reform Party caucus that rejected the view that women were a politically relevant interest. Right-of-centre organizations that eclipsed the Progressive Conservative party in 1993 and following included the Reform Party, the Canadian Alliance, and the merged Conservative organizations. Each of these successor parties consistently maintained that territory was the overarching, politically salient cleavage in Canada. After 1993, many MPs from these parties vigorously pressed an anti-government intervention, anti-debt and deficit, anti-Charter of Rights and Freedoms, anti-reproductive choice, and anti-gay rights agenda that merged economic laissez-faire ideas with the “family values” norms of social conservatism.

Given the contrast between these ideas and second-wave feminist beliefs, it is not surprising that relatively few women ran as Reform, Alliance, or merged Conservative Party candidates or won seats as MPs for those parties (Newman and White 2006, 116-17; Young 1997, 84). Moreover, right-wing formations hold a tenuous electoral base among women voters in Canada, even in their target regions (on the background to this gender gap, see Bashevkin 1993, ch. 2). Yet, the presence of this political stream in Parliament since 1993, particularly since the election of a Conservative minority government in 2006, complicated the assumption that increased numbers of women MPs and cabinet ministers would translate into pro-feminist policy influence.

Dovetailing with Pitkin’s thesis, two additional sets of arguments have been advanced in response to the question of why women matter. One set follows from research on the tenor of debate in political groups and institutions, claiming that a meaningful presence of women in these bodies is associated with lower levels of political conflict, greater emphasis on collective consensus, and higher standards of interpersonal respect. Although considerable debate has focused on how to define a meaningful presence or “critical mass” of women in politics, this procedural perspective suggests that the number of women can matter for the climate and conduct, as well as the content, of group debate. Scholars who study many different political environments observe that the tenor of debate in political spaces where women hold a significant proportion of seats is more reasonable and collegial and less adversarial and conflictual than in spaces dominated by men (Sawer, Tremblay, and Trimble 2006, 18-20).

Finally, from the perspective of political justice, women matter because their presence or absence serves as a barometer of basic fairness in democratic systems. Looking back to Aristotle and others in the classical political theory tradition, we can trace the long-standing role of citizen voice and citizen representation in grounding a common-sense understanding of democracy. From this vantage point, women's under-representation places in stark relief a lack of voice in legislatures, for example, and reminds us of barriers to access that potential political participants face. Representative democracy seems impaired, partial, and unjust when women as a majority of citizens fail to see themselves reflected in the leadership of their polis and when men as a minority of citizens control most levers of power. Justice arguments thus focus attention on women's right to participate in public decision making and their right not to face discrimination in civic life.

Given patterns of urban immigration since the 1970s, Canada's cities attracted increasingly diverse residents from all corners of the world. As the people of Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, and other large centres looked less and less like Canadians of earlier generations, issues of ethno-cultural and racial representation in civic and political groups were raised widely. How would local community groups, women's organizations, and political parties respond to the challenge of representing diverse identities within their ranks? Could media outlets be pressed to present women actors from non-traditional backgrounds, including lesbian politicians, in a fair and balanced way? The chapters that follow begin to take up these and other questions about the contemporary dynamics of public engagement.

### **Research Contributions**

Overall, this volume demonstrates the variety of opportunities as well as the obstacles that women participants in community and feminist organizations, as well as in parties, legislatures, and public life generally, continue to face. The challenges represented by ethno-cultural, geographical, sexual, and other differences among women, alongside a more general waning of feminist activism, cast a critical light on the view that progress in women's participation forms part of an automatic or inevitable march of democratic progress (on intersectionality as a tool for political science analysis, see Hancock 2007; Weldon 2006). Moreover, the reluctance of many women to engage with electoral and, especially, party politics means the supply of willing candidates is not necessarily growing over time.

Part 1 of this volume considers community and women's group engagement, focusing on openings as well as limitations to involvement at that level. Caroline Andrew's discussion opens with a review of Canadian and comparative arguments that non-partisan neighbourhood, ethno-cultural, and other local groups are more open to women's participation than parties and legislatures and thus provide a valuable springboard to mainstream

politics. Using one civic engagement initiative in Ottawa as her focal point, Andrew assesses efforts to draw diverse groups of women – including those from Aboriginal and immigrant backgrounds – into municipal politics. She concludes that although femocrat strategies were useful at this level, participation in local groups in Ottawa did not directly transfer to the realm of municipal politics. Andrew speculates that female activists were more likely to be changed by their community group experiences in public life than they were to actively change local politics.

Parallel with Andrew's study of community group engagement, Mary-Jo Nadeau's chapter grapples with the challenge to civic participation that followed from an increasingly diverse population in the 1970s and in subsequent years, questioning how diversity among women challenges their civic participation. "Rebuilding the House of Canadian Feminism" probes the internal dynamics of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), a leading feminist umbrella group established in 1972, during a period when tensions over racial difference tended to eclipse more established organizational cleavages along the lines of region, language, or sexual identity. Nadeau situates NAC's internal challenges in the broader context of struggles over the ability of feminist organizations to claim to represent women as a group in Canada. She shows how efforts to construct an anti-racist women's movement at the federal level unfolded at the same time as major external threats jeopardized overall movement legitimacy. The rise of neoliberalism coupled with the declining relevance of the federal government to social policy in Canada meant that progressive social movements were squeezed between, on the one side, an over-arching attack on the core relevance of the state and, on the other side, a proliferation of sub-national and supra-national actors that few outside Quebec had the resources or expertise to access. Nadeau's chapter reveals the extent to which women-only organizations faced multiple internal and external obstacles that made participants turn more of their attention inward, towards each other, rather than outward, towards the formal political realm.

Taken together, these contributions demonstrate the extent to which doors to women's participation remain only partly open in community and feminist groups. While Andrew's account of the City for All Women Initiative (CAWI), which involves municipal decision makers as well as immigrant women in Ottawa, documents how efforts were made in some localities to create new spaces for engagement, this same study shows that transitions from community groups to mainstream political involvement were neither smooth nor automatic. Similarly, Nadeau's account of anti-racist politics in NAC during the 1980s and after underlines tense relations between minority and white women in Canada's largest feminist umbrella organization, which, in turn, undermined the group's political legitimacy and credibility as a voice of women.

Part 2 of this volume tackles questions of legislative participation, notably opportunities and obstacles relevant to winning parliamentary seats. Existing research in this area identifies a number of structural barriers to female engagement and frequently concludes that women are advantaged by proportional representation and disadvantaged by single-member plurality arrangements (Anderson 1991). In her chapter, Manon Tremblay evaluates this argument in light of the relatively high numbers of women who won seats in Quebec's National Assembly. She reports that, during the period from 1972 to 2002, nationalist politics in Quebec mobilized women into both major provincial political parties. In fact, many female candidates in Quebec obtained nominations and contested seats in constituencies in which their party was likely to win. The two parties competing for provincial power in this period, the Liberals and the Parti Québécois (PQ), built reasonably close links with organized feminism. Tremblay speculates on the ties between these contextual factors and the ability to win legislative office, asking whether a first-past-the-post system is necessarily unfavourable to women. She notes that, although women had held roughly one-third of National Assembly seats and prominent cabinet and opposition portfolios for some time, it was not until 2007 that a woman (Pauline Marois in the PQ) became a major party leader in Quebec.

In her chapter on federal-level engagement, Louise Carbert asks whether cities are more congenial to women's involvement than less densely populated areas. Research on Westminster systems suggests female participation is enhanced by electoral system reform, by high rates of seat turnover that offer women a chance to win open seats, and by internal party rules and initiatives – usually in centrist and progressive parties – that actively seek out female candidates. Carbert highlights a significant rural versus urban dimension of the story that has been neglected to this point: female MPs in Canada are overwhelmingly drawn from urban and suburban constituencies, notably in the Toronto and Montreal areas, and federal and many provincial electoral systems tend to under-represent those urban populations. Her contribution probes the origins of the former pattern, including relations between organized feminism and parties in different parts of the ideological spectrum, as well as challenges facing rural and urban women's mobilization in Canada. Carbert concludes that the rural deficit provides a durable, stable, and robust explanation for the stagnant number of women MPs in the House of Commons.

By interrogating many powerful assumptions in this field of scholarship, the contributions to Part 2 shed critical light on our understanding of doorways to participation. More specifically, Tremblay's assessment presses hard against claims that single-member plurality electoral rules have constituted, by themselves, an obstacle to women's involvement. Her discussion raises the possibility that effective feminist mobilization in Quebec, combined

with the presence of nationalist sentiment elevating the significance of the government in Quebec City and the long-term dominance of relatively centrist political parties in that environment did more to advance opportunities for legislative engagement than the absence of proportionality did to limit those chances. In a parallel way, Carbert's analysis casts considerable doubt on across-the-board (as opposed to targeted or selective) efforts to encourage parties to nominate more women in winnable constituencies. Her rural-urban comparisons reveal that federal parties on the centre-left and centre were already reasonably effective in recruiting female candidates – but they did so in cities rather than less densely populated areas, where seats were often held by conservative formations.

Part 3 of this volume explores the complex interplay of opportunities and obstacles with respect to cabinet and party leadership. Lesley Byrne's account of Ontario provincial politics probes the policy consequences of representation at this level, exploring what happened in the 1990s when a centre-left party nominated women candidates, voters elected them, and leaders appointed many to cabinet positions. At first glance, such circumstances appeared tailor-made for realizing Pitkin's concept of standing-for representation. Byrne argues, however, that, despite the feminist backgrounds of many NDP women, organized women's movements were far from satisfied with the policy changes emanating from the Ontario government of the day. Her account suggests that even as major gains occurred in elite-level numbers, views differed as to the substantive impact of more women participants in cabinet.

Sylvia Bashevkin's chapter distinguishes between systemic or stage limits, on one side, and individual or actor obstacles, on the other, as they affected women's campaigns for federal party leadership between 1975 and 2006. Stage factors include a party's ideological environment, its relations with organized feminism, and the level of political competitiveness. Actor-level variations include the personal confidence, occupational background, and financial assets of individual candidates. Bashevkin's study shows that women contenders did better on the stages of uncompetitive parties, particularly those of the left and centre-right, than on the platform of competitive parties or hard-right organizations. At least one well-resourced, confident female candidate with a business background – Belinda Stronach in the 2004 Conservative race – was unable to overcome stage-level obstacles in order to win party leadership. Bashevkin's account finds little empirical support for assumptions that individual attributes can trump or overcome structural barriers to elite-level engagement in Canada and elsewhere.

Since Agnes Macphail first entered the Canadian House of Commons in 1921, news accounts have often considered women politicians to be deviants from the stereotypic profile of a heterosexual, married man with children. By also training attention on the personal style (including hair and clothing)

of women in public life, media stories have tended to treat these individuals as lightweight “fluff” rather than political actors with ideas, beliefs, and policy positions. What happens when journalists confront a party leadership candidate who deviates from the norm along the lines of gender and sexuality? Joanna Everitt and Michael Camp examine the treatment of Allison Brewer who, in September 2005, became leader of the New Brunswick NDP and the first openly lesbian leader of a mainstream party in Canadian history. They compare coverage of Brewer with media accounts of gay men in Canadian public life and with portrayals of heterosexual women in politics. Everitt and Camp explore how Brewer was labelled a pro-choice “activist” early in her partisan career and seemed unable, despite repeated attempts, to deflect that label. Consistent with Bashevkin’s findings, Brewer led an uncompetitive party; after trying unsuccessfully to improve the fortunes of the New Brunswick NDP, she resigned as leader in November 2006.

Considered as a group, the research findings in Part 3 reveal the various shadows and blockages that surround doors to elite-level participation. Byrne’s study unearths the complex and often fraught conversion in Ontario, from numbers of women in cabinet during the 1990s to substantive policy changes expected by feminist interests. Bashevkin’s chapter shows that even as individual women made their way through party networks to become leadership candidates, their ability to win top positions was constrained by institutional factors, including the competitiveness of those same political organizations. Everitt and Camp confirm this pattern, demonstrating how Canada’s first openly lesbian party leader was marginalized not only by her gender and sexuality but also by the weak political circumstances of her party. Brewer’s media image in New Brunswick newspapers tended to reinforce this pattern, in the sense that the opening of space for a lesbian politician to present her policy platform was compromised by a narrow media focus on Brewer’s activist background in the pro-choice movement.

Part 4 of this book follows directly from Everitt and Camp’s study. Elizabeth Goodyear-Grant asks in Chapter 9 whether, given patterns of media stereotyping, female MPs can create and maintain favourable public images. In particular, do Canadian legislators confront the same obstacles to balanced coverage as do their counterparts in other Westminster systems? Using data drawn from interviews with women and men MPs, Goodyear-Grant examines how politicians perceived their coverage and tried to craft alternate images, and she shows how female MPs were often unable to divert journalists’ attention away from their family status, clothes, and speaking style. Her chapter concludes with a comparative account of media coverage challenges facing women MPs in Canada and elsewhere.

In Chapter 10, Elisabeth Gidengil, Joanna Everitt, and Susan Banducci use evidence from Canada and New Zealand to assess voter stereotyping of women candidates. Existing research shows that members of the general



public evaluate the personal characteristics and competencies of female political leaders differently than those of males, but this research has relied on experimental designs rather than surveys that ask voters about actual leaders. Gidengil, Everitt, and Banducci saw an opportunity to shift the focus from hypothetical to real politicians in the 1993 Canadian and 1999 New Zealand elections, when women led multiple parties in both countries. Their analysis finds little evidence that voters engaged in gender stereotyping, but it does show that they engaged in party stereotyping.

Both chapters in Part 4 uncover a mixture of participatory constraints and opportunities. In terms of limits, Goodyear-Grant shows that female MPs understood they were constructed and presented to the public differently than their male counterparts. On the level of openings, her chapter reveals a sense among women parliamentarians that they could proactively shape media accounts. Possibly the most hopeful finding in this volume follows from Gidengil, Everitt, and Banducci's data on the tendency of voters in Canada and New Zealand to stereotype women leaders on the basis of party rather than gender. This pattern challenges claims that citizens not only find it difficult to conceive women and power in the same frame but also to dissociate female politicians from substantive political ideas (including party platforms).

Part 5 explores remedies and prescriptions and asks, what can be done to push forward women's participation, including at the level of scholarly contributions? In Chapter 11, Sylvia Bashevkin uses the studies in this volume as a guide to propose a brief agenda for future research and lay out some related avenues of political action. What assumptions in previous research have been unsettled by the analyses presented here, and what directions appear most promising for scholarship in the field? Can academic studies provide useful lessons for political activism, particularly for Canadians who want to heighten and improve women's public participation? In short, how might research in this area help to open doorways further?

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Part 1  
Community and Women's Group  
Participation



## 2

# Women and Community Leadership: Changing Politics or Changed by Politics?

*Caroline Andrew*

The objective of this chapter is to advance our understanding of the ways in which women exercise political leadership. I want to bring to this subject reflections based on a very specific project and then use these observations to reflect on more general questions about women and leadership. The subtitle of the chapter situates its major theme: changing politics or being changed by politics? This is one of the fundamental questions in the research literature on women and politics – to what extent do women transform politics, or, rather, does politics transform women?

This chapter looks at this question through a very particular lens: the work done by women in positions of community leadership. What happens to these same women when they begin to act in the formal political system? What kinds of leadership did they demonstrate in the community context? Is their local leadership style eliminated, transformed, or enhanced when transferred into the arena of formal politics? Do they then understand that the community work they were doing was political?

Before examining the specific case evaluated in this study, it is important to point out that local government in Canada is not a constitutionally recognized level of government on a par with federal and provincial regimes. Cities in Canada are very much the creatures of provincial governments but, for the most part, do not have political parties that replicate in an exact way the parties operating in their respective provinces.

### **Case Study**

The specific case considered in this chapter is the City for All Women Initiative or Initiative: Une ville pour toutes les femmes (CAWI-IVTF) in Ottawa.<sup>1</sup> I am a participant-observer in this project; consequently, the discussion that follows reveals an intimate knowledge of process but less of an analytical perspective than would otherwise be the case. The project had two inter-related dimensions: first, providing civic engagement training for women

from community-based organizations – including new immigrant, Aboriginal, and disabled groups – and from backgrounds in which they were marginalized by poverty and the experience of violence; and second, integrating a gender and diversity equality guide into both municipal decision making and public policy in the City of Ottawa. The project seeks to integrate politically the full diversity of women in Ottawa. The chapter thus deals with the same political issues as those addressed by Mary-Jo Nadeau in Chapter 3, in which she examines the anti-racist politics of NAC. Chapters 2 and 3 are, therefore, not simply about the political engagement of women; they also expand that subject to focus on the particular challenges faced by marginalized groups of women in the exercise of political leadership.

The transition described in this chapter extends from leadership in community-based organizations to leadership in municipal policy advocacy. It may seem relatively minor when compared to the leap from local to national or international political leadership, but the transition illustrates many of the same questions. Do women practice an identifiable type of leadership? Are women's leadership styles at the community level compatible with participation in mainstream political institutions? Are leadership styles in formal, mainstream politics by definition masculine or simply characteristic of formal politics? These questions are not meant to suggest biologically based explanations of public leadership; they are intended to highlight the social conditions of leadership. The transition I want to reflect on is the movement from community politics to formal politics and what this means for women's exercise of leadership.

The case study is quite specific since community politics in Ottawa is not the same as community politics in Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver. Size has a lot to do with this, but so too does the socioeconomic profile, extent of ethno-cultural diversity, and history of immigration in each city.<sup>2</sup> Ottawa is a big small town, dominated principally by the federal government and, to a lesser degree, the technology sector. Ethno-racial diversity remains a relatively new phenomenon in Ottawa, despite the long history of relations between francophone and anglophone communities. Simplifying the story considerably, one can say that community activity in Ottawa is polite and muted compared with that of Toronto or Montreal, but is considerably more assertive and diversity-focused than that of the small towns and rural areas discussed by Carbert in Chapter 5 of this volume. The former generalization relates both to the more middle-class socioeconomic profile of Ottawa and to the reality that larger cities tend to bring forth a more diversified and more polarized politics (Community Foundation of Ottawa 2006).

Reflecting on the specific character of community politics in Ottawa also sharpened my reflections on methodology and the value of case studies, as outlined by Bent Flyvbjerg in *Making Social Science Matter* (2001). Flyvbjerg argues for the merits of what he calls "information-oriented selection," where

“cases are selected on the basis of expectations about their information content” (79). The CAWI was chosen in order to be able to examine in detail the interactions between this particular group of community actors and the municipal political system. The level of detail was possible because of my participant-observer position and necessary because the subject being studied, the translation of the community leadership of women into formal political leadership, required an analysis of specific interactions.

The following discussion is divided into four parts that situate the analysis of the community leadership of women, describe the CAWI, analyze the ways in which models of leadership were and were not transformed and, finally, attempt to theorize our findings about women’s political leadership, respectively.

### **Women’s Community Leadership**

Given the vast literature on community development work, this chapter cannot examine the entire field. Rather, my intention is to understand how women’s roles have been understood and, particularly, to probe the specific characteristics of women’s community-based leadership.<sup>3</sup> One very helpful analysis is Kristina Smock’s book (2004) on community organizing and urban change. Smock describes five models of community organizing: power-based, community building, civic, women-centered, and transformative. They vary according to what is identified as causing inequality and, therefore, as resolving inequality. Proponents of the power-based model see a lack of group power as the problem and prescribe confronting those who have power (so as to gain respect through recognition) as a resolution. The community-building model focuses on the lack of internal group or neighbourhood capacity as the problem, with the resolution being action to strengthen the social and economic fabric of the group or community. The civic model identifies the breakdown of social stability as causing inequality and prescribes finding new mechanisms to protect the public order. According to the women-centred model, the dichotomization of public and private spheres and the exclusion of women from the public sphere are the central problems. Its solutions range from reframing relations between the spheres to increasing women’s participation in public spheres. Finally, the transformative model identifies existing systems as the problem and views conceptualizing alternative visions as the beginning of change.

Smock draws out a common core feature from the models, notably a shared view that community organizing builds both individual and community capacity. It develops local leaders, creates networks, and grows social capital. Social capital is built through patterns of informal and formal interaction that build relations of trust and reciprocity. And, in turn, this enhanced social capital allows for more effective collective action (Lowndes 2006; O’Neill and Gidengil 2006; Putnam 2001). Lowndes looks specifically at differences

between the social capital of women and the social capital of men. She argues that “men and women tend to have different social capital profiles, with women’s social capital more embedded in neighbourhood-specific networks of informal sociability” (224). The link is therefore made between stronger social capital and neighbourhood-level organization. For her part, Smock outlines four areas of activity that are useful to situate the work of women in community organizations: governance structure, diagnosis of community problems, collective action to bring about neighbourhood change, and, finally, widening the scope of work for broader change.

Susan Saegert builds on Smock’s model in her analysis of civic capacity in urban neighbourhoods (Saegert 2006). Her point of departure is community capacity building, as distinct from community organizing and community development. She concludes that cooperative and confrontational approaches often coexist in specific organizations: “While the organizing strategies of consensus-oriented and confrontation/competition-oriented approaches differ, successful development of community civic capacity depends on using the right approach at the right time, in the right place, and with the right people. The attainment of civic capacity requires the ability to form distinct interests and goals, to develop shared agendas, and to act collectively. It requires cultivating strong and weak ties, recognizing allies and enemies, and changing the cast of characters as contingencies shift” (ibid., 291). Community building in general emphasizes “relationship building, leadership development, increasing relational and organizational skills of residents and organizations, sustaining stakeholder engagement, developing a sense of common purpose and an action agenda, and increased local institutional capacity” (ibid., 275-76). This approach parallels the importance attached by women-led organizations to “the human and relational development of community members and organizations” (ibid., 279).

Several conclusions follow from Saegert’s analysis, and they relate directly to the importance of empirical research on community-based organizations. Detailed studies are necessary to better understand the ways in which cooperative and confrontational strategies interrelate in practice and to comprehend how individual relationship building and collective capacity building fit together in practice. Once more, this underlines the importance of Flyvbjerg’s argument that case studies provide a depth of knowledge that is difficult to achieve using other methodologies.

This background helps to inform our interest in women’s community-based leadership. The question of cooperation versus confrontation is often linked to gender, especially women’s association with cooperative methods and men’s association with confrontational ones. Saegert suggests this assumption needs to be studied in real-world organizations. In addition, she posits that the association between women’s leadership and attention to individual-level relationships within organizations must be empirically investigated.



Gerda Wekerle's (2000) analysis of women's organizations in cities looks less at the structures of organizations, which is the focus of both Smock and Saegert's analyses, and instead concentrates on the content and basis of group claims. In Wekerle's words, "In cities throughout the world, women are invoking the language of rights and citizenship in making a multiplicity of collective claims on the city for the fulfillment of basic needs, space and inclusion ... resistance and mobilization from below that provide us with alternative models of urban citizenship rooted in women's multiple identities of class, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation" (203). She goes on to discuss different bases for women's claims to equal urban citizenship. Wekerle shows how rights arguments can be framed either within the discourse of human rights or as part of a gendered perspective that confronts both the advantages and limits of the "mobilization potential of maternalism" (*ibid.*, 208). She develops a detailed description of rights claims that are based on "the life spaces of daily life": "Women are also making rights claims as gendered subjects that demand spatial-temporal spaces that support everyday life. They argue that their standpoint and gendered experiences have been excluded and denied by decision-makers, politicians and corporations that shape cities as growth machines, or the global nodes for the accumulation and flow of international capital" (*ibid.*, 209). The political practice that emerges from this last approach is, according to Wekerle, "an alternative politics that is pragmatic and rooted in daily life" (*ibid.*, 214). Again, this view needs to be investigated empirically in order to understand how the transformative potential of alternative politics can be linked with the pragmatics of daily life.

Wekerle's analysis also recognizes the importance of overlaps or intersections between gender and diversity, particularly since women's community organizing is rooted in the specific circumstances of daily life. This acknowledgment of intersectionality recalls the work of Olena Hankivsky (2005), who criticizes gender mainstreaming because of a failure to investigate "the complex circumstances involving gender differences and intersectionalities and multiple identities" (977). Hankivsky proposes a "more expansive diversity mainstreaming framework" (*ibid.*, 987) that would take better account of advances in feminist theory, as well as the complexities of HIV/AIDS, sex trafficking, and other issues in which gender, class, race, and international boundaries are all implicated. Her conclusion, which is very similar to that of Wekerle, is as follows: "If the promise of GM (gender mainstreaming) – that is, social justice – is to be realized, there is a pressing need to integrate present feminist knowledge about the context of lives and experiences, structured inequalities in the public and private spheres, and gender with all its intersectionalities" (*ibid.*, 996). This literature underpins our case study of women's community leadership. Writers in this field substantially agree that women's community leadership is marked by what Wekerle describes

as “an alternative politics that is pragmatic and rooted in daily life” (2000, 214). Smock and Saegert emphasize the importance of governance structures, strategic action choices, and relations between individual and collective capacity building. Hankivsky’s focus on the importance of using a diversity of lenses supports Wekerle’s argument that women’s preoccupation with daily life necessarily places intersectionality in a central position. Women’s daily lives do not segment or isolate multiple identities; rather, race, class, language, gender, sexual orientation, and age are only some of the dimensions that shape their particular forms of community leadership. So now, back to Ottawa.

### **City for All Women**

The CAWI is the second phase of a project in Ottawa that links women and local politics (Andrew and Klodawsky 2006; Andrew et al. 2004). The first phase began in 1998 with the decision by the Regional Council of Ottawa-Carleton to endorse the International Union of Local Authorities’ (IULA) Declaration on Women in Local Government and to create a Working Group of Women’s Access to Municipal Services. Although Ottawa-Carleton offered no funding and no staff positions, the working group eventually obtained funds for femocratic staff appointments from Status of Women Canada. Staff members organized focus groups and, owing to their energy and commitment, took very seriously the working group’s declared intention to include a full range of diverse women in them. Somewhat to our surprise, the focus groups were splendidly diverse. They led to a report, a response from Ottawa-Carleton, and the project ending with the lesson that, although some interesting and innovative activities were going on, no consistent integration of women in their full diversity existed in the city.

The second project, the CAWI, took off in 2004 from this starting point. Participants were determined to learn from the lessons of the earlier project, in which city staff members engaged only on a volunteer basis. This had been unsatisfactory from a civil service point of view, because it led to increased workloads and, even more importantly, because it reflected a view that integrating diverse women was neither important work nor the main business of the city. For the CAWI to succeed, city staff would need to be paid for their efforts so that the project would become part of the regular municipal workload.

Yet, a looming budget crisis meant the city was too busy to think about the CAWI. This impasse led to a very innovative element within the CAWI: training in civic engagement, which came about once community-based women’s group representatives expressed their desire for municipal government training. In interviews, diverse women said they knew nothing about how the city operated and found city hall an alien environment. They felt they did not belong in city hall and city hall did not belong to them – this

was the recurring theme. So the CAWI decided to set up training programs for women from community groups to learn about municipal policy making and policy advocacy. Ottawa's budget crisis lent itself very nicely to the practical exercises, and the women, in small groups, prepared policy proposals and met with local councillors to present their proposals.

The highpoint of the process came when CAWI trainees made a presentation to the Ottawa City Council during public hearings on the budget. A group of sixteen women, all wearing peach-coloured scarves, stood up, sang a song, and then made two hard-hitting presentations on the detrimental social impact of increasing public transit fares and the importance of restoring community funding grants. The group – in terms of size, colour, and dress – was wonderfully diverse, and their presentation made an impact, if one can judge from the remarks of the elected officials immediately afterward and in the months that followed. In part, the fact that they were noticed was luck – they appeared after a long series of elderly, white, affluent residents called for decreased services, increased public transit fares, and, more generally, a reduction in the quality of urban public services. The contrast was striking and, in visual terms, showed the difference between an Ottawa of the past and a new Ottawa in the making.

The CAWI subsequently launched a second round of training and worked with the city to develop and test a gender equality guide for use by city managers. This work involved both city staff members designated to work with the CAWI and other city staff. The CAWI also undertook a pilot project with Community and Protective Services, the largest city department. Ottawa City Council voted to implement the CAWI's gender equality guide city wide in 2007, following a positive evaluation of the pilot project (City of Ottawa, CAWI, 2005, 2006). This decision was endorsed by senior management in June 2007.

The fact that the City of Ottawa was starting at such a basic level might be viewed as surprising, given that it had a history of inclusive practices. For example, the former mayor, Marian Dewar, worked to welcome and integrate Vietnamese boat people. Yet, the subsequent Harris years at the provincial level led to cuts in funding for urban diversity programs, leaving Ottawa in a position in which it more or less had to begin from zero.

The gender equality guide built on the 2002 Equity and Diversity policy of the City of Ottawa, which recognized as designated groups women; visible minorities; people with disabilities; gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered citizens; and Aboriginal people. The policy related both to the municipal workforce and to incorporating the spirit of equity and diversity into municipal policies and programs. The gender equality guide was organized around seven phases of policy formulation: research or information gathering, consultation, policy development, project/program development, communication, service delivery, and evaluation. At each stage, the text raised

questions about relevant social differences and inequalities that needed to be considered. Examples included family responsibility, unpaid work, time use, personal mobility, safety, and discrimination.

Following from the designated groups list, basic dimensions of difference were identified as follows: Aboriginal ancestry, income, race or ethnicity, language, physical and mental disability, marital status, family status and dependents, age, religion/culture, geographic location, length of time in Canada, and sexual orientation or identity. In fall 2006, the guide was evaluated to assess its usefulness; preliminary results indicated a positive evaluation from those city managers who had initially been trained in its application. Interestingly, some managers indicated that the material had been new and valuable to them, whereas others felt they were already aware of the content. The latter said they could see the material presented in a systematic way, and they therefore found that the guide was useful to them as well.

The CAWI's equality guide (2006) is based on the importance of including women's experiences in urban policy making: "Women are experts in day-to-day living, as a large majority of them juggle family and work demands. Women from equity-seeking groups have particular perspectives to bring in creating a more inclusive Ottawa. The experience of the full diversity of women and their organizations will not be fully considered unless specific steps are taken to ensure their inclusion" (8). The guide and its evaluation framework were developed through committees set up by the CAWI steering committee. Some committee members were from women's community groups, while others, including women who worked as training and evaluation professionals, were from the city at large. The latter were chosen carefully so as to represent the diversity of women as much as possible. The categories that were particularly salient to the CAWI were women from francophone, visible minority, and Aboriginal backgrounds. The delicate balancing of professional skills and community women's voices within the overall structure of the CAWI was crucial not only to embrace different perspectives, resources, and time dynamics but also to ensure that both constituencies learned about community capacity building and policy advocacy.

The transition or bridge from community leadership to municipal policy advocacy needs to be looked at in more detail. Local group activists were still involved in community leadership activities, but, via the CAWI, their work took on an additional dimension of formal politics. Community leadership varies in its forms but reveals the striking archetype of the woman leading a women's committee in an ethno-specific organization. The formal leadership of the larger group is male, but the real work is done by the women's committee. Women involved in the CAWI training initiative did remarkable amounts of community work, from organizing major fundraising events to solving endless individual-level problems that smoothed interactions between bureaucracies of the host society and members of their

particular community (for example, to obtain public health cards). This problem solving extended the traditional female role of caring to an immigrant settlement context where the volume of necessary caring work had dramatically increased. Children – the women’s own children and others in the community – needed help to negotiate the school system.

Many of the CAWI women faced their own economic and, especially, employment difficulties. In a number of cases, they juggled part-time employment and extensive community work with education and training. They shouldered these burdens quietly and almost invisibly – the formal leadership of their community-based organizations was male, while women described their contributions as merely carrying out community wishes in a collective way as part of the women’s committee. Overall, their caring work in the community was usually described as doing things that needed to be done.

The settlement context in Ottawa transformed the traditional caring roles of these women into more substantial leadership roles. They became the mainstay of their families, extended families, and communities. They were involved both in building a specific community and in building bridges to the structures of the host society. In quiet ways, they acted with great competence and were aware of the skills they brought to work within their communities. They knew why the official leadership of their communities was male, and they were aware of the contradiction between the Canadian discourse of equality on gender and ethno-cultural grounds, on one side, and the realities of life as recently settled women in Canada, on the other.

### **Assessing the Transition**

How did these women deal with the transition from community activity to engagement with formal politics? One dimension of this process for many was a move from acting principally within a single ethno-cultural community to acting in a multicultural environment. This part of the transition brought both challenges and positive energy to the training program. For many CAWI participants, the experience of acting in a group composed of both Canadian- and foreign-born women was a first. There was a sense that this represented Canada at its best, as an egalitarian, diverse community in which participants reached beyond the already intricate circles of people they cared for and cared about in their immediate families, extended families, and communities to embrace diverse women in Ottawa. This process illustrated the complex web of relations between individual and collective levels of capacity building and demonstrated that, for women in the CAWI project, concern for each other was integrally connected to views about collective action – the two were inseparable.

At the same time, the process brought with it the challenges of inclusion-ary development work. Differences between communities are often large, and skill is required to avoid making some bases of equality seem more

important or valid than others. Luckily for the CAWI, the staff person was extremely skilled and highly sensitive to the potential for destructive hierarchies. Thanks to her abilities, the process was inclusive, and positive energy prevailed, despite a number of tense moments.

It must nevertheless be recognized that many women felt intimidated when they interacted with formal politics. For most, the first reaction was to retreat to the position that they knew nothing, whereas the politician and staff were all-knowing and all-powerful; according to this view, the imbalance of power was a fixed given. This was a first reaction, which prompted an interesting collective decision by community women about how to present themselves in the mainstream political arena. Their presentation to Ottawa City Council during the budget debates was a carefully thought-out performance that was grounded in remaining true to the values of community leadership while intervening effectively in official politics. This approach followed a long discussion about how to organize the presentation. Because the women were comfortable with their community roots and not committed to playing exactly by the mainstream rules, the decision to start with a song reflected their commitment to a different form of leadership. At Ottawa City Council the rules allow two speakers to have five minutes each, not sixteen women singing. The CAWI chose to sing in order to make the point that their expertise and legitimacy were community-based. Plus, they also wanted to have surprise value and attract attention. The song was also deliberate in that it made the points that life is holistic and culture is an integral part of community life; formal politics, by contrast, is one isolated area of activity in the modern hyper-segmented world. For CAWI participants, if the world of formal politics divides life into five-minute pieces, then the world of community leadership does not.

The song itself was clever. The music was slightly romantic but the lyrics were not; they said, "Please listen to us because if you don't, we'll remember this at the next election." These words reflected the same kind of deliberate transgressing of boundaries as the strategy of singing. Both were part of a conscious political choice and a commitment on the part of the women to remain true to themselves. The CAWI, in short, not only built community leadership but also leadership for municipal policy advocacy. It entailed confrontation, of a particular sort, as well as cooperation.

The city council intervention required effort, organization, and nervous energy. Participants planned to follow the song with two short presentations by two different women, and much coaching and practising was done for them to feel at ease at city hall. In this case, group action via song was easier than individual action via spoken word, since, for these women, playing an individual and publicly visible role was much more difficult than exercising community leadership. But their pleasure in succeeding carried with it a lesson that the transition was both possible and fruitful.

## Conclusion

What are the lessons learned in terms of women's engagement? Three come to mind: first, changing politics and being changed by politics; second, the potential for transforming leadership skills from community to mainstream political bases; and third, the need for a deliberate process.

We can start with the question that is central to the study of women and politics: Does bringing women into formal politics change women or change politics? The fact that this is a slippery research question does not make it any less important, but rather more challenging and complex. The CAWI story suggests both processes can occur at the same time; that is, changes are made to politics but also to women's political behaviour. In this sense, in answer to the question posed in the introduction to this volume, one could conclude that the doors to participation are open wider than in the past. Following Arjun Appadurai's (2001) study of the organization of India's urban poor, we can think of small changes to the political process as precedent setting. This may be an overly optimistic view of the cumulative effects of small changes, and it certainly is a different position from that of authors who insist on the path-dependent nature of formal politics. However, according to Appadurai's analysis, this view comes from group recognition that political change is a very long-term process and that patience must remain the fundamental political position. Appadurai also links patience with good humour: if you take the long view of political change, then short-term problems illustrate the absurdities of life and can be seen as amusing. Indeed, laughing together also illustrates interrelations between individual and collective levels of capacity building – it builds inclusion on an individual level while at the same time creating a common perspective that supports collective action.

This is an appropriate perspective to apply to the CAWI. Can singing before Ottawa City Council be seen as setting a precedent for a more inclusive public space? At another city council committee meeting, CAWI members gave roses to staff members and elected councillors who had supported the gender equality guide. This behaviour transgressed the formal political process, but it did so in a way that had multiple references: it evoked women's traditional roles (loving flowers, appreciating beauty) in addition to the reverse of these roles (women giving flowers to men rather than receiving them from men). It also spoke to women's political militancy (by referencing "bread and roses"). The CAWI's behaviour at the council and committee meetings provided either one significant step towards a more egalitarian relationship between ordinary citizens and the formal political arena or such a small step as to be insignificant.

If the argument about women changing politics is best cast in a long-term perspective, then what about the argument that politics changes women? This is also a long-term process, one made up of many small steps.

For example, once individual women became known through their CAWI activity, important political and bureaucratic actors began to recognize and talk to them. These women were able to grasp opportunities to lobby significant political actors for their proposals. As former “outsiders,” they took on attributes of political “insiders” and thus held a changed position. This constitutes but one small paving stone on the path to political engagement.

Our second consideration focuses on the potential for transferring leadership skills from community to political bases. Again, the CAWI case provides complex and nuanced perspectives. I observed no automatic transfer: women who behaved in leadership roles in their particular communities often saw themselves as knowing nothing about formal politics and as having no resources to bring to the formal political process. Yet, as their deliberations before the budget presentation indicate, CAWI participants demonstrated their ability to think strategically about how to convert community leadership skills into mainstream advocacy skills. Once they framed the question of how to make the most effective presentation with an appropriate level of comfort and good performance, they felt more competent and experienced. Clearly, their performance successfully combined community leadership skills with political leadership skills.

This brings us to the third and final point, which concerns the necessity to deliberately develop political leadership skills in women now active at the community level in Canada. This echoes the second question raised in the introduction, how can the doors to participation be opened even wider? This question is, of course, particularly important in the case of women coming from marginalized or “racialized” communities, a theme which is also treated in Chapter 3 on NAC by Mary-Jo Nadeau. There are, of course, women who have done this on their own, but, as a society, Canada will waste huge amounts of human talent if political integration processes are simply left to chance. A number of training programs are already in place at different spaces in the political continuum, but we need a great many more.

The CAWI project showed that many other areas of training would be useful and important. They include training for community-based women on how to interact with school teachers, school principals, social workers, and other front-line workers in the institutions of the host society; building on training in civic engagement in order to develop policy advocacy skills; offering learning opportunities for women who are thinking about running for public office; and training female candidates who have declared their intentions. Training requires a specific focus, and that focus has to square with how potential participants understand their needs at a precise moment in time.

The CAWI experience suggests training must be context-specific, and it shows how much can be learned from contacts between different groups. There are many experiences to share, a fact that recalls the literature on



community work. In the CAWI, participants learned how to integrate intersectionality (defined here as multiple group identities or affiliations held by single individuals), construct alternative visions in a pragmatic way, present views clearly to people who oppose those views, build capacity on individual and collective levels, build coalitions around the issues of daily life, and sustain these coalitions across a diverse range of women and women's groups.

This chapter set out to advance our collective understanding of women and political leadership. Its particular contribution is to illuminate the enormous amount of community leadership that is undertaken by women in contemporary Canada, particularly among recently settled immigrant groups. Women in the CAWI cared for individual members of their communities, for their communities as collectivities, and for their communities' connections to the host society. The case study confirms two core themes. First, it is possible to combine political leadership roles with community leadership roles. Second, to do this well, Canada needs an explicitly planned process and a long-term horizon, since, to properly empower community-based women, training must respect and engage the lives of the participants.

The case study also raises significant questions. Is Appadurai right to suggest that small precedents can slowly produce a major transformation of politics? Can training alone allow community-based women to engage more effectively in formal politics? Or are more open and porous political systems a prerequisite for successful integration? These questions lead us to the next chapters in the book, notably towards their insights into how women's political engagement is both enabled and limited in contemporary Canada.

### Notes

- 1 The work of the CAWI-IVTF was funded by Status of Women Canada, the Trillium Foundation, and United Way of Ottawa.
- 2 The style of community leadership exercised by immigrant women in Ottawa is not unique, however. One comparative example comes from a chance encounter, in the Zurich airport, on a stopover from Toronto to Delhi. I met a woman from Calgary who was president of the Canada-Tibet Women's Association. Her community work in Calgary was strikingly similar to that of the CAWI women in Ottawa, which is detailed later in this chapter. She helped obtain driver's licences for other people, did their shopping, dealt with medical problems, and assisted with other interactions with the host society that required language skills. At the same time, she organized major fundraising events in Calgary to aid Tibetans living in refugee camps, and she mirrored the CAWI women in projecting a quiet sense of her own competence and an understanding of the importance of her community work. In the middle of writing this chapter, I was particularly struck by the similarities between community leadership in Calgary and that of the CAWI women in Ottawa.
- 3 I am aware that this review of sources neglects the rich feminist literature on grassroots organizations. It focuses instead on studies of community-based organizing, especially women's role in the organizing process.

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