

Running head: The experiences of female members in the Nova Scotia Legislature

The experiences of female Members of the Legislative Assembly in Nova Scotia

Lori Errington

Mount Saint Vincent University

### **Dedication**

Thanks to everyone who helped me throughout this journey. Your support means more than you will ever know.

Mom, you always told me that I could be anything and do anything if I gave it my all. You have always been my ultimate role model and your public service makes me so proud. You are my hero.

For my late father, I wish you could be here to share this with me, but I'm happy to know that your love of politics and writing are a legacy that lives through me. I miss you and love you.

I thank my family and friends for your love and encouragement each and every day. You make me want to make the world a better place.

### **Abstract**

The Nova Scotia Legislature is Canada's oldest House of Assembly, dating back to 1758 (Nova Scotia Legislature, 2011). In its entire history, 31 women have been elected to the House of Assembly. Political analysts and supporters of women's equal representation in government are trying to encourage more women to run for political office in Nova Scotia. However, little attention has been given to the atmosphere that waits for women once they are elected. The research question of this thesis asks how female Members of the Legislative Assembly experience the communications atmosphere in the Nova Scotia Legislature. To determine this, I apply feminist communication theory and feminist organizational theory to data collected through feminist participatory qualitative interviews with current and former female members of the Nova Scotia Legislature. The thesis concludes that while women have made some gains in the political sphere in Nova Scotia, they still encounter a male-dominated, largely unwelcoming atmosphere when they are elected to the House of Assembly.

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## **Chapter One: Women in the Nova Scotia Legislature**

It is one of life's unforgettable moments. I was a staff member at a political caucus office. There had been a provincial election and our party had added new Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) to its ranks. Now, the legislature was sitting and members were preparing for their very first experience asking questions in Question Period. A couple of days into the session, a new female MLA rose near the end of the day's questions to make a relatively benign query from her constituency. It was her first question as an MLA. In response, the cabinet minister got extremely animated and yelled at the member, his face turning purple and hand waving in her direction. When the MLA returned to the office afterward, she was upset and quite shocked by the Minister's response. Her question had been straightforward, earnest and politely worded. His response had been vitriolic and aggressive. Why?

To those of us on caucus staff, this member's response to Question Period was nothing new. After each election, we did our best to prepare new members for the legislature. In particular, Question Period was always an area of concern. This parliamentary tradition is the high theatre of the legislature: few other processes are as dramatic, heated or challenging, whether you're on the giving or receiving end of questions. Some MLAs thrive in the cut and thrust atmosphere of Question Period, while others struggle. In my experience, many female MLAs faced challenges of learning to speak and act in ways that were foreign to them, in order to survive the combative nature in the House of Assembly. We worked with some members to help them adapt and learn to function in this environment, but there were women who never fully made that adjustment. I observed that they could be judged harshly by their peers for poor performance in the House.

My observation of the legislature and the people who serve in this storied institution left me with many questions, which are the driving force behind my desire to conduct research into the communications atmosphere in the House of Assembly. I want to develop a better understanding of how female MLAs experience the legislature and Question Period in particular. How do they feel about the environment in which questions are asked and answered? Are there strategies or coping mechanisms these women employ in order to function? If so, how do they do it? Do the legislature and its traditions create an environment that is more difficult for women, if one accounts for gender differences in communication styles? These many questions lead to the key research question that guides this thesis: how do women members of the legislature experience the communications atmosphere in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly?

The question is open and not finely targeted, and this is deliberate. The theoretical, epistemological and methodological foundations of my research demand a research question that allows the maximum flexibility. In so doing, the expressions and reflections of the women who are interviewed are validated and expressed, regardless of what they say. The purpose of this research is to give the women involved a voice. The research question allows for positive and negative experiences, and everything in between. As a researcher, I headed into the interview phase of this project expecting to have my observations negated, validated and challenged.

There are many reasons why the experience of women in the legislature is important to study and discuss. In over 250 years of parliamentary democracy in Nova Scotia, only 31 women have been elected to the Nova Scotia Legislature and two-thirds were elected in 1996 or later (Parliament of Canada, 2011). While the province currently enjoys the largest cohort of female Members of the Legislative Assembly that it has ever seen, women are still greatly outnumbered by their male counterparts.

Organizations such as Equal Voice Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities have put much effort into educating women about provincial and municipal political processes, and encouraging more women to seek political office. However, very little attention has been paid to the issue of the environment waiting for women who are elected.

I place a great deal of focus on Question Period, because of its importance within the legislative orders of the day. Question Period, while of short duration relative to the other functions of the Legislature, is a time where the most media attention is focused on the members asking and answering questions. It is a microcosm of political life, and performance during Question Period is often used to judge the performance of the member. While many politicians will tell you that it's a small part of their job, much emphasis is placed on the ability to survive – and thrive – in the combative atmosphere of Question Period.

It is true that heated debate during legislative sessions, especially Question Period, is nothing new in the Westminster style of parliament (Feschuk, 2010). Heckling and jeering by members within an atmosphere of passionate rhetoric is a part of the long history of parliamentary procedure. In recent years, politicians, political scientists, and the media have discussed the often-combative atmosphere, particularly in the federal House of Commons, within the context of declining voter turnout for federal and provincial elections and a lack of engagement of younger Canadians in the democratic process. The issue was raised during the 2011 federal election, and the new Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition in Parliament, New Democratic Party Leader Jack Layton, said his party would avoid engaging in heckling (Bryden, 2011; Moose Jaw Times Herald, 2011; Postmedia news, 2011; Smith, 2011, Wattie, 2011). In a television panel interview on CTV's Power Play with Don Martin (2011) after the



election, MP Megan Leslie explained that there is a difference between the traditional cajoling that takes place in parliament and the sort of heckling that was becoming commonplace in the House of Commons:

Can I pick up on something Rodger said, because you did say question period is still question period. Absolutely. And there's nothing wrong with cheering and there's nothing wrong with, oh, come on. You know, there's nothing wrong with being passionate like you're saying, Dean. But it's the, it's the targeted attacks. I will point out, there is a gender issue in the House when, especially when certain women get up, the heckling starts before they even get their question out. And heckling is different than being emotional. Heckling is something, it's a whole new level, taking it to a new level. And it's not, it's not appropriate. (p. 1)

Green Party Leader Elizabeth May also voiced her concern over the tone in the House of Commons, in a CBC interview shortly after she was elected:

I must say, one of the things that's really critical to me is to improve civility in the House, to end heckling in Question Period... I'm prepared to stand on the rules that say a member of Parliament is not to be interrupted when they're speaking, other members of Parliament are not to speak in ways that are disrespectful about fellow members on the floor of the House of Commons. There are a lot of rules that are routinely ignored... (May, 2011).

The new, more stringent treatment of heckling and decorum in Parliament started in June, 2011, as I started writing this thesis, so it's difficult to assess how successful the attempt to bring more civility to the House of Commons will work. However, it is clear from several media and political pundits that they are not keen on the new world order. Toronto Sun columnist Bryn Weese summed up the new "polite question period" as "boring as sin" and further opined "Turns out question period without heckling is like chicken wings without hot sauce – meaty but bland" (Weese, 2011). On a political panel on CTV's Power Play with Don Martin, the Globe and Mail's Bill Curry bemoaned the new behavior, saying:

Everybody knows there's a good six newbies here. And you can just see, they might have gone overboard with this whole decorum thing, I think it is a safe bet. And it's disappointing, too, to see, when you see how they're going about question period. It's the same as the Liberals did it. You come in with a whole set, every single question is planned regardless of what the answers are. You know it would be nice to see a little bit of back and forth. Maybe some wiggle room at the back end so you can follow up and say what did you mean when you say that, but that, everybody's reading and that just takes the life out of the whole room (p. 1)

Scott Stinson wrote in the National Post that much of the first day of the "new" House of Commons "was as staged as a ribbon cutting", describing a moment when yet another congratulations on re-election to an opposing member led the House to break out in gales of laughter (Stinson, 2011).

The focus on restoring decorum to legislative proceedings is not limited to the federal House of Commons. In Nova Scotia, the Speaker of the House of Assembly spoke to the decorum in the Legislature during Question Period on September 30, 2009:

Before we go to Question Period, I just want to take a minute and bring to your attention - if I can indulge you for a second - yesterday's Question Period. I find it difficult to bring this matter to the attention of the House, but I feel it's necessary. I certainly don't want to be seen as interfering with what I've come to admire as the spirit and liveliness in this place. But, I just want to take a minute to ask for the support of all members of the House to deal with certain problems that I've observed here yesterday and previously, especially during Oral Question Period. I believe, I guess the best description of the difficulties, as I see them, is just a general lack of respect - whether here of the institution, of each other or for the authority of this Chair. While it is not my style, nor my wish to be seen as authoritarian or inflexible, I feel it is important that order and decorum have to be held on a higher level than witnessed here yesterday...Having said that, I just again say that this Chamber, we certainly have a stellar history. It has witnessed fervent passionate debate. Different points of view are the lifeblood of this place and will, I hope, remain that way. But mutual respect has to be part of that mix. As has been said many

times, the special rights and privileges of members also comes with equally special responsibilities. (Hansard, p. 618)

These comments occurred during the first session of the legislature after the June 2009 provincial election, which resulted in the defeat of the Progressive Conservative Government, and the election of the first New Democratic Party majority government in the province's history. The session was particularly fractious, and speaker Charlie Parker was reacting to days of heated and loud debate. When a new Speaker, Gordie Gosse, was selected for the Spring 2011 session of the Legislature, he, too, began enforcing the rules of the House of Assembly with new stringency and vigor. One of the key issues he confronted was the recent habit of members referring to each other as "you", which breaks the rules of all questions being in the third person, going through the Speaker to the member opposite. On April 6, 2011, shortly after the Spring session began, the Speaker reminded members of the correct form of address:

In debate, which includes Question Period, members are not to refer to other members as "you" or use "your" in reference to other members. For example, a question should ask the minister about his decision - it should not be phrased so as to ask you about your decision. This is basic parliamentary courtesy and it will be upheld in this Chamber. All comments and questions directed to other members are to be addressed through the Chair and should be phrased in the third person. (Hansard, April 6, 2011)

Later, on April 11, the Speaker once again reminded members that the rule would be enforced: "Order, please. Again, we're using the word "you", you know, I'm not going to read the same

speech over again but I would remind all members, please, ask the questions using the third person when asking questions” (Hansard, April 11, 2011).

The combative environment in the Nova Scotia Legislature and the federal House of Commons leads to the question: if decorum and respectful debate are issues for legislators, what do female members, who are in the minority, experience when they step into the chamber? If we truly want to encourage more women to seek political office in Nova Scotia, a good starting point would be to explore how those who have been, or currently are sitting MLAs experience the process. They are uniquely qualified to tell us the story of being a female MLA in Nova Scotia. By listening to their voices, perhaps we can begin to identify issues and seek solutions that will truly begin the process of equal gender representation in the Legislature. Giving past and present female legislators in Nova Scotia a forum to have their voices heard is the purpose for my research and this thesis.

### **Current research on women in politics**

There has not been much research conducted into the experience of female politicians once they are elected. However, the election of a record number of women to the British Parliament in 1997 spurred a pocket of research into the experience of women MPs in that country (Allen & Dean, 2008; Bird, 2005; Lovenduski & Norris, 2003). Lovenduski & Norris (2003) questioned whether the election of 120 women to Westminster in 1997 – double the number of women elected in 1992 (p. 90), had an impact on Parliament. When women in Blair’s Labour Party voted in favour of cuts affecting single mothers, they were sharply criticized, and given the epithet “Blair’s Babes”, which lasted long beyond the life of the 1997 Parliament (p. 90). While female members toed the party line, as is the norm in the party-discipline model of

Westminster politics, Lovenduski and Norris discovered that they did bring different values and attitudes into Parliament (p. 98). Progress may have been slow – even glacial – but it was there:

We can conclude that the entry of more women into Westminster will not generate a radical revolution in the predominant culture at Westminster, as the more optimistic scenarios suggest. But nor are there grounds to believe that the entry of more women into Westminster merely led to ‘politics as usual’ (p. 100)

Lovenduski and Norris conclude that women bring different values, especially on issues affecting the equality of women at work, at home and in the public sphere. With the election of more women change will come, but it will take time (p.100). Bird (2005) explored how the election of more women to the British Parliament in 1997 affected the types of questions being asked by backbenchers. They found that men were much less likely to refer to questions involving the words “gender”, “male” or “female”, and indeed most questions involving these terms and issues were asked by female MPs (2005, p. 355). Allen and Dean (2008) have also examined how the jump in female MPs in 1997 affected women’s representation. Looking back on the results of the 1997 election and subsequent years of British government, they concluded that what “was hailed by many as ushering in a new dawn in terms of women’s representation” was better characterized as “the situation improved from truly horrendous to fairly bad” (p. 214). They noted that democratic politics are “contaminated by specifically male or masculine attributes” (p. 214), noting that the rituals of Westminster are grounded in masculine ideas of politics, and feminine styles of rhetoric are “marginalised and belittled” (p. 214). They argue that this resulted in many new female MPs encountering difficult existing norms and practices.

They also were the subject of sexist and even hostile behavior from their male colleagues in the House of Commons (p. 214).

While there are not many studies on the experiences of women in Canada's House of Commons, the results of the May 2, 2011 federal election tell us a story about where we are on the path to gender equality in our Parliament. 451 women ran for election, across all parties throughout the country: 76 were elected, or 25 per cent. That is a record number of women elected to the Canadian Parliament, as the previous House of Commons had 67 female members, or 22 per cent (Parliament of Canada, 2011b).

Britain and Canada are not alone in struggling to bring more gender equality to their parliaments. A 2000 study conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) surveyed hundreds of parliamentarians from around the world. The major focus of the survey was the reasons why women do not run for parliament. It concluded that "the life stories of women compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union show that the world of politics, which is intrinsically conflictual, is still broadly unwelcoming to women" (IPU, 2000, p. i). The study's authors added that women must "learn the rules of the game and the language of politics, while fully preserving their identity as women and avoiding the pitfall of demeaning imitation of their male counterparts" (IPU, 2000, p. i).

Much of the remaining research centers on women running for politics, versus their experiences once they attain office. Lawless and Fox (2004; 2005) conducted extensive survey research into the attitudes of women and men regarding running for office and seeking election. They discovered that women were far less likely than men to consider themselves as qualified to run for politics. If they did seek election, it was much more likely to be at lower levels of power such as school boards and municipal councils (Lawless and Fox, 2004, p. 3). Another key

finding in their study is that women are far more likely to need to be asked – sought out – by a political party in order to decide to run (Lawless and Fox, 2004, p. 5). One of the main reasons, they theorize, is because women are not raised in environments that normalize or even support political behaviour, therefore seeking candidacy and being a vocal advocate is not appealing (Lawless and Fox, 2004).

Wicks and Lang-Dion (2008) discuss the potential for more women running for Canadian federal government against the backdrop of the 2007-2008 bid by Hilary Rodham Clinton for the Democratic presidential nomination:

Despite the small gains women may have made in politics over the past two decades, political leadership remains defined on masculine terms...Hillary Clinton is no exception. Recently, a Fox news commentator proclaimed Hillary Clinton was losing the male vote because of her nagging tone of voice stating, “When Barack Obama speaks, men hear, ‘Take off for the future’. And when Hillary Clinton speaks, men hear, ‘Take out the garbage’ (2008, p. 34)

With the 2008 United States presidential election, another round of scholarship is emerging, analyzing the campaigns of Hillary Rodham Clinton for the Democratic presidential nomination and Sarah Palin for Vice-President (Bligh, Merolla, Schroedel, & Gonzalez, 2010; Carlin & Winfrey, 2009; Falk, 2009; Harp, Loke & Bachmann, 2010; Oles, 2010). I will explore these articles in depth in the theory section of this paper. However, I was excited to find that many of the articles approach the Clinton and Palin campaigns from the perspectives of feminist rhetorical theory, further expanding the cache of articles in this field. I hope that the academic



exploration of women and politics, especially from feminist communication and feminist rhetorical theory, will continue to broaden and deepen as the result of the recent Canadian federal election and as the United States heads toward its 2012 election for President, Congress and the Senate.

There has never been a study conducted in Nova Scotia that focuses on the atmosphere in the legislature, particularly from women's perspectives. This project is breaking new ground.

Indeed, little research has been conducted into feminine rhetorical style making a connection to the male-dominated traditions and procedures in parliament or legislatures. I believe that the data gathered for this thesis will provide material that will advance the study of gendered communication styles and politics.

I hope that this research will validate feelings that female MLAs have had about their experiences in the political process and within the House of Assembly. It is also my goal to provide research that will be useful in the ongoing discussions and deliberations of legislators in Nova Scotia regarding female participation. While working with female MLAs in the past decade, I have witnessed their particular challenges and struggles. The opportunity to ask them to describe their experiences in their own words will add to my understanding of the reality faced by female MLAs. I hope that my research will act as a launching pad for further research into how women experience the world of politics and legislatures as organizations.

Finally, recent events in Tucson Arizona in which Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords was shot in the head and several others were killed or injured at a community meeting on January 8, 2011 prove that the discourse, the rhetoric among elected officials, *matters*. Congresswoman Giffords had been featured on a page with gun target icons on politicians who could be defeated in 2012. In an era of escalating aggressive political rhetoric, I hope that by

discussing the communications atmosphere in the legislature, and by raising awareness about the impact on female members, social and political change can be realized in the future.

## **Chapter Two: Theoretical foundation and methodology**

The focus of this project is to provide an opportunity for women MLAs to share their experiences in the Nova Scotia Legislature in their own voice and on their own terms. This approach is grounded in feminist standpoint theory, which forms both the epistemological and methodological foundations of my research.

From an epistemological point of view, feminist standpoint theory acts as a response to the positivist tradition, which is explained by Joey Sprague and Diane Kobrynowicz (2004), who state that “At the heart of positivist epistemology is the focus on objectivity...According to positivist epistemology, subjectivity is an obstacle of knowledge: the observer’s personality and feelings introduce errors in observation” (p. 78). To positivist researchers, the ultimate goal of their work is “perfectly detached, neutral, distanced, publicly observable space” (Code, 1995, p. 15).

The feminist critique of positivist epistemology argues that the ideals of positivism emerged in the 1800s and in male-dominated academic circles, which sustain the “authoritative states of modern science” (Code, 1995, p. 17). Code suggests that positivistic research assumes that the dominant voice in society is the correct foundation of knowledge. As female scholars and students took part in the second wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, they realized that there were major gaps between the official story of mainstream research and women’s actual lived experiences (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007).

Feminist scholars believe that positivism’s focus on objective and external research has excluded women’s voices from the epistemology, discounting the contribution of women’s experience and perspectives to the formation of knowledge in society (Hunter, 1999a; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). Sprague and Kobrynowicz (2004) contend that standpoint theorists

believe that each subject is “specific, located in a particular time and place,” which means that a researched, or the “knower” has a distinct and valuable perspective on that subject. Hunter (1999a, 1999b) and Jagger (2008) argue that positivism classifies emotions and feelings as “unauthorized” forms of knowing, accepting only the rational. Canadian sociologist Dorothy Smith (1987), one of the earliest proponents of feminist standpoint theory, asserted that this has led to women’s perspectives being left out of traditional scholarship:

Being excluded, as women have been, from the making of ideology, of knowledge, and of culture means that our experience, our interests, our ways of knowing the world have not been represented in the organization of our ruling nor in the systematically developed knowledge that has entered into it (p. 17)

Smith, who was speaking about methods in feminist sociological research, called for considering women’s standpoint in society “as an experience of being, of society, of social and personal process that must be given form and expression” (p. 36). She called on feminist researchers to re-think their entire assumptions about the validity of lived experience and subjectivity in the formation of knowledge. Smith called for the development of new research methods that put women at the centre and preserve their standpoint throughout the research process (p. 187). Sprague and Kobrynowicz (2004) say that feminist standpoint theory affords the epistemologic privilege to the standpoint of women and other oppressed groups, allowing for the development of better understanding (p. 80).

Hunter (1999a) points out the similarities between standpoint theory and rhetoric, which has specific application to the focus on rhetoric in this proposed thesis. Hunter argues that Marxism offers an answer to the “loss of rhetoric as a moral and ethical training in strategies for

agency and empowerment” (p. 246). Standpoint theory is rooted in Marxist critical theory, and therefore its tenets lend themselves well with those of rhetoric, especially its focus on standpoint, which is a critical piece of rhetorical stance (Hunter, 1999a). Feminist standpoint theory extends the rhetorical notion of standpoint, and its considerations of social context (Hunter, 1999b) and how “different standpoints negotiate social and political agreements and actions that can form conversations and negotiations across and between communities, to considerable benefit” (Hunter, 1999a, p. 128). Hunter further points out that rhetoric considers the viewpoint of the audience - Ethos and Pathos - and stance, and if they are out of synch, power imbalance can take place (Hunter, 1999b, p. 243). Where the paths of rhetoric and standpoint theory differ, according to Hunter, is that rhetoric is limited in its ability to affect ideology and to cope with political and social activity, whereas standpoint theory has a clear goal of affecting social change (Hunter, 1999b, p. 243). Feminist standpoint theorists test how applicable rhetoric is to excluded, or oppressed, audiences, and particularly to women (1999b). Hunter also asserts that bringing together rhetoric and standpoint theory allows for the non-positivist approach of discussing such issues as realities negotiated on “probable grounds”, worked on collaboratively by the community (1999b).

The question, therefore, becomes, if women are an excluded group within the political rhetoric of the Nova Scotia Legislature, how can we examine the rhetoric itself in order to better understand the potential challenges specifically encountered by female MLAs? The theoretical framework that will help develop this understanding is feminist communication theory, specifically feminist rhetorical theory.

### **Feminist communication theory**

Feminist communication theory explores communication styles from a critical perspective, focusing on the power structures and equality issues created by certain styles of communicating. The Westminster parliamentary form of government has its own traditions and styles of communication that can be better understood and explored through the lens of feminist communication theory. Gayatri Spivak (1988) argues that feminist communication theory “has played a part in illuminating the role of voice in the construction of inequality and oppression” (p. 104). Lana Rakow (1992) asserts that feminist communication theory brings together gender, communication and social change.

Feminist communication theory also meets the requirements of the feminist standpoint theory epistemology that scholars who engage in it seek to enable change. According to Lana Rakow and Laura Wackwitz (2004), feminist communication theory is “explanatory, political, polyvocal and transformative” and it focuses on three key themes: “difference, voice and representation” (p. 8). Feminist communication theory scholars look to external force - how the media and popular culture portray and respond to women, but they also consider internal mechanisms - how women communicate (Rakow and Wackwitz, 2004). This is of great importance to understand how women elected to the Nova Scotia Legislature experience communications within the Westminster tradition to which the House of Assembly holds. At the very cusp of the emergence of feminist communication theory, Spivak (1988) predicted: “The work of these and other scholars promises fruitful directions for developing more sophisticated theories about voice, agency, difference, and experience in feminist communication” (p. 105).

Karlyn Campbell (1971) was one of the first scholars to propose that the dominant male rhetorical style was at odds with women's communication style. "In fact, insofar as the role of rhetor entails qualities of self-reliance, self-confidence and independence, its very assumption *is a violation of the female role*" [emphasis in original] (Campbell, 1971, p. 126). Campbell goes on to explain that the "rhetoric" of the women's rights movement is really an anti-rhetoric that rejects key elements of traditional rhetorical style. Women tend to be collaborators and story tellers rather than debaters, and this brings them into a position of being at odds with the Westminster style of parliament. Campbell's work is the cornerstone for the development of the theory of feminine rhetorical style, which has been used by many scholars in their explorations of women in the political process.

Bonnie Dow and Mari Boor Tonn (1993) conducted a case study of the rhetoric of Texas Governor Ann Richards to establish a clear Feminine Rhetorical Style, and to explore the "philosophical, as well as tactical" implications of such a style (p. 287). Citing Campbell's work in their analysis of Richards' use of feminine rhetorical style, they assert that the use of concrete examples and anecdotes, self-disclosure, and engaging the audience in a relationship based on nurturing, has the potential to create new models of political judgment (p. 298). They also conclude that, in using feminine rhetorical style, Richards "...creates an implicit standard for political judgment that is based on the primacy of experiential knowledge and inductive reasoning. Second, it explicitly critiques the validity of claims that cannot meet this standard" (p. 289). Jane Blankenship and Deborah Robson (1995) explored feminine style in women's political discourse and proposed five key characteristics to feminine rhetorical style:

1. Basing political judgments on concrete, lived experience.
2. Valuing inclusivity and the relational nature of being.

3. Conceptualizing the power of public office as a capacity to "get things done" and to empower others.
4. Approaching policy formation holistically.
5. Moving women's issues to the forefront of the public arena (p. 359)

In 1995, Karlyn Campbell studied some of America's earliest examples of public speeches by women to study the rhetorical style. Her analysis led her to conclude that society constructed the notion that only male rhetoric is compelling, however the moment a woman leaves feminine style in favour of a masculine style of speaking she loses the audience (Campbell, 1995). In 1998, Campbell provides another historical exploration of women's rhetorical "invention", asserting that women adapted their rhetorical styles, using tactics available to them at the time, to mete out subversion to male institutions and power. She celebrates the feminine rhetorical style as empowerment for women (Campbell, 1998).

Using different applications of the theory, Shawn Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles (1996) put forward the idea that the male hegemony was using feminine rhetorical style to mask masculine material and points of view. They looked for feminine style in films done by male presidential candidates. Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles caution that feminine style, while celebrated as a means of tremendous potential political change (p. 338), it actually may be contributing the marginalization of women in a world where the "constructs of candidate image (at least at the presidential level) still depends heavily on traditionally 'masculine' myths, icons, and character traits derived from participation in male-based institutions" (p. 349-350). They caution that women cannot risk being "too 'feminine'" because they may contribute to cultural perceptions that they are "weak and incapable" (p. 350). Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles' work



refers to the double bind theory of Kathleen Hall Jamieson (1995), who discusses five double binds for women seeking to be leaders in male-dominated spheres. One of those double binds applies to femininity and competence. Jamieson says that double binds against women in American Society date back as far as 1631 with the Salem witch trials, where women's innocence was tested by throwing them in the water with a weight around them. If they drowned, they were innocent. If they didn't drown, they were in complicity with Satan, so they were executed (p. 3). Double binds act as traps for women who have the temerity to step outside their socially-prescribed spheres: "When our foremothers overstepped prescribed boundaries, they confronted situations constructed to ensure that they were guilty until proven guilty" (1995, p. 3). Jamieson argues that the double-bind is usually used by those with power against those without it, and history demonstrates that women were most often the intended subject (p. 4). She refers to the double binds of women's speech. Quoting Senator Barbara Boxer, Jamieson describes the communications Catch-22 for women in politics:

In 1972, to be a woman in politics was almost a masochistic experience, a series of setbacks without a lot of rewards... If I was strong in my expression of the issues, I was strident; if I expressed any emotion as I spoke about the environment or the problems of the mentally ill, I was soft; if I spoke about economics, I had to be perfect, and then I ran the risk of being 'too much like a man' (as quoted in Jamieson, 1995, p. 6)

Jamieson says this particular double bind expects women to be feminine, but if they are too feminine, they are accused of being incapable of being taken seriously or making difficult decisions (1995, p. 120). In addition, Jamieson explains that women's vocal pitch is even

subject to criticism. Higher female voices have been mocked by women's peers, leading women to be coached to lower their voice if they wish to be taken seriously (p. 121).

Since Jamieson's seminal work, many authors have used the notion of double bind to explain the plight of women seeking entry into the political sphere, especially those who seek leadership roles. Shawn Parry-Giles (2000), like Karlyn Campbell (1998) explored the way the media treated Hillary Clinton while she was First Lady. She found that the media buoyed and enhanced the public "rhetoric of fear around powerful women" while judging Clinton by the cultural expectations for First Ladies (p. 208). Parry-Giles concludes that "While the journalists acknowledge her educational and career successes, fear and skepticism pervade Hillary Rodham Clinton stories" (p.209). She says that while Clinton and her staff would stage events intended to provide positive visual images, the media would exercise a lot of control over how the meaning of that visual discourse was put forward to viewers (p. 211). The use or lack of use of visuals was also exercised by media to control Clinton's narrative: when discussing Clinton's education, images of her commencement speech at Wellesley were used, however, seldom were images portraying Clinton as a successful career woman in her own right ever used. Images seemed to jump in time from her education to her life with Bill Clinton (p. 211). Parry-Giles also points out that image manipulation, camera angles, story repetition and other forms of mediation add to the negative public perceptions of Clinton (p. 214). According to Parry-Giles, this manipulation often involves using file footage, taken elsewhere and then used out of context. For example, when the Whitewater scandal erupted, in which Clinton was implicated, CNN broadcast a clip of her talking to someone behind her, laughing. A microphone is sitting on the table in front of Clinton. The caption "Whitewater" was imposed over the image while the newscaster read the story about the grand jury hearings. The use of the image implied that (a) it was from the

Whitewater grand jury testimony and that (b) because she was laughing, Clinton was not taking the issue very seriously (p. 212). However, there were no media permitted in the grand jury, and the image was not of Clinton testifying regarding the Whitewater investigation (p.212).

Karrin Vasby-Anderson (1999) takes a different approach to studying the challenges faced by women politicians who want to appear to be confident and capable while not being vilified by the public in a way experienced by Hillary Clinton. Vasby-Anderson explores the use of the word “bitch” as a rhetorical containment tool for women with power (1999, p. 600). She posits that sexual containment rhetoric began during the suffrage movement, where women who spoke to “promiscuous audiences composed of women and men” were labeled “masculine, unwomanly, aggressive and cold” (p. 601). Using the term “bitch”, she argues, has become the most recent incarnation of sexual containment, and the consequences for women in politics are substantial (p. 611). For example, when Hillary Clinton, then First Lady, led the failed attempt at health care reform in the United States, the use of “bitch” by pundits to describe her “overshadowed her substantive discourse (and) it circumscribed her political agency” (p. 613). In other words, the word “bitch” was used to stifle what she had to say and shut her down. Vasby-Anderson said the use of this epithet is dangerous because it is used as a weapon against powerful women, lending the perception that they do not need to be taken seriously (p. 614). Vasby-Anderson describes the word as the “default term for describing ambitious women in public and professional life”. Unfortunately, the problem has followed Clinton into her role as Senator, and as a candidate for the Presidential nomination. In 2006, New York Post columnist John Podhoretz referred to Clinton as a “bitch” in a book on her aspirations to become President, stating in a television interview that he means the term as a form of compliment, because she will be the next President and the first woman President of the United States:

PODHORETZ: OK, I'll put it to you very simply: The first woman president has to be somebody who has qualities that will convey to people that she can stand up before [North Korean leader] Kim Jong Il, [Iranian President Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad, Osama bin Laden, all the worst men in the world, that she can pull the trigger when she has to, that she can negotiate, that she can stand tough and stand tall. Therefore, the first woman president has to be somebody who has qualities that we commonly associate with being unfeminine. She's got to be tough, she's got to be steely, she's got to be adversarial, and she's got to be difficult.

HANNITY: You use a lot of ...

PODHORETZ: And those are all qualities I think Hillary Clinton holds (Boehlert & Foser, 2006)

Trent, Schmisser and Gauder (2000) compared debate strategies between 1984 Vice-Presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro and 2000 Presidential nomination candidate Elizabeth Dole, theorizing that many women seeking office are forced to “masculinize” their speaking style, at the risk of being criticized for becoming too masculine. They explain that early studies of women’s speaking drew critical conclusions about women’s speaking patterns, which included “empty adjectives, questions rather than declaratives, uncertainty and emotion, language intensifiers, and ambiguity” while men’s speech elicits the descriptors “rational, strong and direct” (2000, p. 411). Women who don’t masculinize their speaking style, therefore, risk the audience rejecting their message (p. 411). By contrast, Mandy Manning (2006) challenges the theories regarding the risk women take in adopting more masculine styles, specifically those

offered by Karlyn Campbell. In her analysis Hillary Rodham Clinton's rhetorical style, Manning contradicts Campbell's (1995) assertion that women who take on a more masculine rhetorical style risk losing the audience (2006). She asserts that when Clinton attempted to adopt feminine rhetorical style in an earlier speech as First Lady, it was a failure, however ten years later, when she appears to have found her own voice, her speech was far more passionate and engaging (p. 113). Clinton's rhetorical style, in contrast to a feminine style, is what Manning calls a "professional rhetorical style": one that comes from a place of professional expertise, rather than personal experience (p. 109). Manning asserts that Hillary Rodham Clinton, in turning around masculine speaking styles to use them for her own advantage, is "successfully negotiating a woman's role in politics" (p. 109).

Michaela Meyer (2007) says that putting women in the position of rhetors has allowed the arguments about "feminine style" to take place, identifying patterns and forms for female speakers (p. 3). She asserts that there is a role for feminine "invitational" rhetoric, which invites the audience "to see the world from the rhetor's perspective and does not judge or denigrate others perspectives" (p. 5). She argues that feminist rhetorical analysis can expose power relations through the study of feminine rhetorical style and the notion of women appropriating more masculine styles (p. 6). She echoes Jamieson (1995) and Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles' (1996) assertion that women adopting masculine styles do so at the peril of being labeled "dominating or aggressive" (p. 6).

While the above-mentioned scholars were focused on Hillary Rodham Clinton's time as First Lady, then in her campaigns for the U.S. Senate, more recent scholarship is emerging that analyzes Clinton's campaign for the Democratic Presidential nomination in 2008, as well as Sarah Palin's campaign as the Republican Vice-Presidential candidate. Michelle Bligh, Jennifer

Merolla, Jean Reith Schroedel and Randall Gonzalez (2010) examine Clinton's rhetorical style in the 2008 Presidential nomination campaign. They target a specific incident, which happened in Portsmouth, New Hampshire after some primary losses, and on the eve of the New Hampshire primary. Clinton, on camera, was asked a question by a young woman, while visiting a restaurant. Her response was very emotional (p. 825). Clinton was reviled by critics, accused of faking her emotional response...but she won the New Hampshire primary. Bligh et al (2010) argue that the role of gender stereotypes in voters' perceptions is a strong one, and the emotional response from Clinton may have been a deliberate change in her rhetorical style for the campaign (825-826). Marked by the media as cold, even called "the Terminator" by Glenn Beck of CNN Headline News (Boehlert & Foser, 2008), Clinton may have made the deliberate choice to cry on camera. Bligh et al (2010) argue that men who show competency are seen as good leaders, while women struggle with the labels of being cold, which certainly applied to Clinton's campaign (p. 827). Erika Falk (2009) also studied the "crying incident" in Clinton's New Hampshire campaign stop. She argues that women who cry are more vulnerable to traditional associations with "emotionality, irrationality and unsuitability for elected office" (p. 60). However, she puts forward that Clinton was "hyper-controlled" in her emotional response, using her emotions to her advantage (p. 60). Falk (2009) also asserts that the focus on Clinton's emotional display by the media and political pundits is symbolic that "such attitudes remain, particularly of how our culture thinks about women and politics" (p. 61). Ryan Shepard (2009) also discusses the gender bias associated with the coverage of the "crying incident" during the campaign. Shepard mirrors many of the arguments of Falk and Bligh et al, but also asserts that female candidates are subject to media stereotyping in how they are covered – at a far more personal level. "Research has indicated that there are several ways that the media focus on the personal aspects of female

political candidates. For example, women running for office seem to be subjected to more commentary about their attire and appearance when compared to their male counterparts (Shepard, 2009, p. 67). He also contends that crying for a male candidate is far less dangerous than for a female candidate, but that candidates can overcome the dangers of crying if they can find “a compelling narrative” that explains the emotional outburst (p. 69). Clinton did this successfully. Shepard argues that “Clinton's ability to adapt to the situation breathed new life into her campaign, helped her find her voice, and served as a model for what female candidates in similar positions might do when confronted with the curse of the double bind” (p. 75-76).

Diana Carlin and Kelly Winfrey (2009) assessed the sexism of the 2008 political campaigns of Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin, saying that “Hillary Clinton put 18 million cracks in the glass ceiling and Sarah Palin contributed to over 58 million more, but the ceiling awaits another historic election to complete the breakthrough” (p. 327). While Clinton was criticized for being too tough and even shrill, Palin was praised for learning how to be tough, while still being feminine (p. 338), avoiding the stamp of being cold and an “iron maiden” the way Clinton was often labeled or portrayed (p. 338).

Not all scholars believe that Sarah Palin was as successful in her rhetoric as Carlin and Winfrey (2009) seem to argue. Dustin Harp, Jaime Loke and Ingrid Bachmann (2010) analyzed the early impressions that Palin made on the media, reflected in articles written immediately following the announcement that she would be the Republican Vice-Presidential candidate. They discuss Palin’s “gender performance” and assert that she offered a unique blend of masculine and feminine traits (p. 291). They determined that Palin’s feminine image of mother and motherly got the most attention of the press and pundits, along with her physical looks, while her toughness and leadership skills were also acknowledged (p. 298). Her toughness and decidedly

masculine rhetoric, they assert, is accepted because of her established femininity (p. 302). This blend of masculine and feminine was characterized by her use of the analogy of hockey moms being pit bulls (p. 302). They assert that this acceptance of toughness and femininity is unusual for female politicians and it marks a departure for females in the public sphere (p. 304). Oles (2010) also explores what she calls Palin's "gender-bending", from the time frame following McCain and Palin's loss in the 2008 election. From this point in time, Denise Oles describes Palin's mixture of masculine and feminine as a detriment rather than a blessing:

Given the tensions between some of these labels, it is not surprising that Palin was unable to articulate a cohesive vice-presidential persona because the image of a rifle-wielding woman contradicts the commonly-accepted picture of a mother who is also a political figure. (p. 353)

Oles further points out that Palin's "tough talk as a maverick and reformer" contradicted the \$150,000 wardrobe, hair and makeup makeover provided by the Republican campaign (p. 353).

Feminist communication theory helps us to understand the gendered nature of specific communication functions, and feminist rhetorical style illuminates the challenges and experiences of women who enter the public sphere of political life. However, another body of theoretical understanding also helps us understand women in political office: feminist organizational theory.

### **Critical organizational theory/feminist organizational theory**

The theoretical body of work in critical organizational theory, particularly feminist organization theory, explores the relationships between power and gender within organizations.



Dennis Mumby (1987) explored the use of narratives within organizations, arguing that narratives played a political role in protecting the dominant power structures (p. 113). He wrote that the recent scholarship of the day was beginning to challenge traditional notions of organizational power, allowing for a more radial interpretation of power within organizations, and illustrating how different systems of rules were used to dominate members in these structures (p. 115). The aspects of organizations that center upon controlling behavior and exercising power are deeply located within the structure, which benefits the interests of some groups over others (p. 116). Narratives serve to produce and reproduce power structures within organizations by reinforcing the ideologies of the groups that hold power. This frames behavior within the organization and determines the acceptable and unacceptable social practices (1987, p. 125).

Gareth Morgan (2006) says that an organization's politics are demonstrated in the "conflicts and power plays that sometimes occupy centre stage" (p. 157). Morgan asserts that organizational politics can be studied by focusing on the relations between interests, conflict and power (p. 156). He adds that when people have different interests, they think differently and want to act in different ways. This often creates tension which "must be resolved through political means" (p. 156). Morgan defines interests as "predispositions embracing goals, values, desires, expectations, and other orientations and inclinations that lead a person to act in one way rather than another" (p. 157). He argues that conflict is always going to be part of organizations, and it can occur between individuals or groups within the organization (p. 163). One source of conflict is gender biases, which are found in "the language, rituals, myths, stories, and other modes of symbolism that shape an organization's culture" (p. 186). He illustrates the importance of language in organizations, arguing that individuals who can't share the language, and who

don't understand what's being discussed can find themselves outnumbered and "out on a limb" (p. 186). He also points out power exists on the surface in organizations, in day-to-day interactions, however, it's also important to realize that the stage upon which actors in organizations engage in political play is determined by factors of race, economics, class and other "deep-structural factors shaping the social epoch in which they live" (p. 191). What Morgan is saying is that organizations, and society, may need to be viewed from a historical perspective (p. 191). Applying this thought to women in the Legislature, they may be equal in name, have titles and papers saying they are the Member of the Legislature for a certain constituency, but the underlying, deeply-held power structures in the traditions and practices of the Legislature may prevent female MLAs from fully engaging their power in the same way as their male counterparts. It also explains why my research is treating female MLAs as a marginalized group within the definition of Feminist Standpoint Theory. In theory, MLAs have more power than most people in Nova Scotia. Collectively, they can pass laws and amend legislation that affects the lives of many people. I am considering female MLAs as marginalized, however, partly because they face obstacles to the practical application of their perceived power.

Marta Calás and Linda Smircich (1989) were among the early scholars calling for new approaches to research into organizations. They noted that the current literature of the day on women in management approached the issue with a focus on "rationality, efficiency and effectiveness of organizational performances" (p. 355). They argue that research into women's experience has a gendered bias in how knowledge is generated, and they call for a "woman-centered organizational theory" (p. 356). They also assert that postmodern analysis can help us understand the exclusions that arise from traditional scholarship, allowing for the possibility of "other knowledges" (1999, p. 658). The Nova Scotia Legislature – indeed all parliaments – are

organizations, just as affected by the patriarchal worldview which Calás and Smircich found in organizational theory literature. Just as they argued that organizational research needs a woman-centered approach, I believe that parliamentary systems also need to be explored from a female-centric view.

Dennis Mumby and Linda Putnam (1992) also argue that traditional organizational theory has a “male-centered, or patriarchal, worldview” (p. 466). They point out that organizational practices “build identities of men and women very differently, with women cast as marginalized actors, who participate in only certain dimensions of organizational life” (p. 466). They developed a theory in response to Simon’s (1972) notion of “bounded rationality”, which centers on decision-making processes in organizations (Mumby and Putnam, 1992). Bounded rationality suppresses the value of emotion and the feminine in decision-making, asserting that they are evidence of weakness (1992, p. 471). Mumby and Putnam theorize that organizations “call on employees to exhibit forced niceness and phony smiles and to suppress anger”, which they call the “managed heart” (p. 471), where individuals change their emotions in order to live up to the expectations of their organization (p. 471). They also argue that organizations control employees’ emotions through rituals and ceremonies (1992, p. 473), which become normal and institutionalized, “embedded in myths and stories that transmit the organization’s values and ideology” (p. 473). They counter that the alternative to such practices in organizations is “bounded emotionality”, where “nurturance, caring, community, supportiveness and interrelatedness are fused with individual responsibility to shape organizational experiences” (p. 474). With bounded emotionalism, the power over emotions lies with the individual, and, they argue, this form of organization leads to better decision-making than rationality. Bounded emotionalism, Mumby and Putnam assert, employs Habermas’ notion of people being driven by

the desire to reach mutual understanding by recognizing the shared values, goals and meanings in the organization (478). Few organizations are as steeped in history, tradition and ritual as parliaments, including the Nova Scotia Legislature. From the placement of the ceremonial mace to the placement of the Speaker between the opposing parties, presumably to keep the peace, the Nova Scotia Legislature has many rituals. Westminster-style democracy has many male-centered traditions, some of which originate in a time of great political upheaval and violence (Curry, 2010; House of Commons, 2010). How do these traditions and myths have an impact on the atmosphere that MLAs experience today? How do women experience those traditions? Bounded rationality and bounded emotionalism can illuminate our understanding of the Nova Scotia Legislature as an organization and a physical space.

Likewise, applying our understanding of women's experiences in management within organizations can help us to find a deeper meaning in the experiences of female Members of the Legislature within that organization. Nancy Nichols (1993) wrote about the experiences of women in the workforce after the days of Rosie the Riveter during World War II. She says that women had proved their abilities during the war effort, but they were quickly expected to return to the private sphere of home, family and child-rearing (p. 54). Nichols says that the rise and fall of Rosie the Riveter can help us understand the plight of "modern managerial women" (p. 54). She argues that being male and a manager have been "synonymous since the inception of the managerial class in the early 1900s", and that women are seen as having characteristics that make them unfit for management, because they're too emotional and don't possess analytical abilities (p. 55). She goes on to explain that early female managers even adopted male dress patterns, spoke like men and used sports analogies in an attempt to fit in and be accepted (p. 56). However, their particular double bind was the view that if they wanted a career and family, they

weren't committed to the company. If they are aggressive, they are viewed as "abrasive and unfeminine and, not to mention bad mothers" (p. 56). She also asserts that women lack the power to create change within the organizations where they work, and that women are still judged as women first (p. 57-58). She adds that when more women rise to the ranks of senior management, change may finally happen (p. 60). In order for change to happen, however, we need to recognize that it is needed, and to understand the ways in which women are affected within the context of an organization. One way to understand this is through organizational communication theory, articulated by Stanley Deetz (2001).

Deetz (2001) theorized that the study of organizational communication could be categorized and applied to described three ways of conceptualizing organizational communication, arguing that it can be seen as a specialty in departments of communication and communication organizations, organizational communication can be seen as a phenomenon in organizations, or it can be seen as a way to describe and explain organizations (p. 5). He argues that he believes that organizational communications performs the third option. One example is the feminist organizational studies lens, where it is demonstrated that male dominance is maintained by the dominant groups in organizations, where the marginalized groups are defined as the "other" (p.6). By accepting this definition as the other, marginalized groups have lost their ability to self-define, and the game is stacked against them within the organization (p. 6). He also argues that organizations are seen as political sites (p.25). Dennis Mumby (2001) also theorizes about organizations as a site of political activity. He speaks to power and politics within organizations, arguing that meanings are produced, reproduced and changed through communications activities within the organization (p. 585). Mumby adds that as a critical scholar, he believes that this process is "mediated by power, which I see as a defining, ubiquitous

feature of organizational life” (p. 585). He also points out that power must be made sense of through the lens of communication, because communication, power and organization are interdependent (p. 585). Sensemaking within organizations exists in an environment where power is in play, by individuals and groups who control and shape the interpretations of events within the organization (p. 595). Mumby advocates for using the lens of feminism to study power in organizations because “Feminist theory...emerges directly from recognizing the institutional character of women’s economic, political and ideological subordination” (p. 609). He argues that 20<sup>th</sup> Century scholarship has largely neglected the lens of gender in studying organizations (p. 609), and asserts that feminist theory and research provides important ways through which we can understand, critique and change organizations (p. 613). I agree that the lens of gender has not been considered adequately in the consideration of power and organizations. While the field of feminist organizational theory is relatively new, and it is expanding, there is a real lack of feminist study of how organizations relate to women and how women function within organizations. This is one of the reasons for undertaking my research and seeking out the stories of women as they work within the structure of the Nova Scotia Legislature.

One of the seminal works in applying feminist theory to organizations is by Linda Ashcraft and Dennis Mumby (2004), in their book *Reworking gender: A feminist communicology of organization*. They attempt to create a new framework for understanding organizations from a postmodernist feminist perspective, which provides an “intersection of power, discourse and the construction of gendered organizational identities” (p. 97). They assert that postmodern feminism deconstructs mainstream organizations, and how women’s identities are crafted through and “in opposition to the discursive resources available to them” (p. 111). They assert that while organizational studies has always recognized the importance of gender in

organizations, the shift to studying “gendered organizations” is a relatively new development (p. 114). They add that in the 10 years preceding their book (2004), research has become robust and innovative in exploring the connections “among gender, communication, power and organizing” (p. 114). Their framework of feminist communicology of organization assumes that gender is complex and it is situated within relations of power within organization (p. 115). The framework they propose is meant to allow the examination of tensions between every-day social practices and deeper institutional practices (p. 116). They assert that gendered organizations “do not ‘exist’ as such, rather they are performed moment by moment through the communicative practices of their members” (p. 116). Discourses are the result of ongoing struggles between various interest groups that are competing with each other. Masculine versus feminine and male versus female are examples of these discourses (p. 123). The purpose of this framework is also to draw attention to the ways that communication practices benefit some interests over others, and to explore the consequences that occur as a result (p. 129).

Given their interest in communication benefiting the interest of some members of organizations over others, it is not surprising that in another combined effort, Dennis Mumby and Linda Ashcraft (2006) turn their attention to the relationship between power and resistance, specifically regarding gender and communication. They argue that “communications does ideological work, constructing original realities and identities in ways that privilege certain interests over others” (p. 78). They also put forward the notion that critical research into organizations falls on the ways in which organizations exercise control in order to imbed the dominant values of the organization in to its members (p. 77). They argue that everything of substance in an organization, “parking spaces, offices, restrooms, salaries, people and so forth – becomes meaningful only through the frames furnished by particular discourses” (p. 80).

Communication, they assert, can invent the material realities within organizations (p. 80). While I did not intend to use their theory to the extent of analyzing the physical space of the House of Assembly as discourse, Mumby and Ashcraft's (2006) research can help illuminate the language in the Nova Scotia legislature and how the discourses of Question Period contribute to the atmosphere and realities in the legislative processes. Specifically, I want to know how the language used in Question Period help frame the relationships of women within the legislature. Are discourses used that make female MLAs feel less empowered or alienated?

Angélique DuToit (2006) wrote about corporate strategy for women in business organizations. She addressed the alienation often felt by women in organizations, explaining that "organizations are historically designed by men for men, dominated by male values and goals and the male career patterns of long hours and very little, if any, time off for daily commitments" (p. 57). She adds that being a successful member of the organization requires tapping into a network from which women are often excluded, denying them "legitimacy within the organization" (p. 60). DuToit argues that dominance – power – is achieved through these male-dominated networks. In order to succeed and to be perceived as successful managers, women must reflect the masculine traits (p. 80). In many ways, DuToit's theories of organizations are similar to the communication theories of Campbell (1971, 1995, 1998), and Trent, Schmisser and Gauder (2000) who address why women often must adapt a masculine speaking style in order to function in political rhetoric. DuToit's theories will complement the feminist communication theories in understanding how organizations may make women feel obligated to adopt male patterns of behavior (including speaking style) in order to survive or to be viewed as worthy within the organization.



The feminist communication and feminist organizational theoretical frameworks complement each other very well in helping us to better understand the structural and communication environments within the Nova Scotia Legislature. They will provide an excellent theoretical base from which to understand the data provided by the interviews with female Members of the Legislative Assembly.

### **Chapter Three: Feminist standpoint theory as a research method**

Feminist standpoint theory does not only directly affect the epistemological point of view in this paper, as explained above. It also calls for the use of new forms of research methods that put women at the centre, attempting to (a) empower the women and (b) use the research to achieve social change (Brooks, 2007; Sprague & Kobryniewicz, 2004). Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy (2007) also point out that feminist research challenges “the basic structures and ideologies that oppress women” (p. 4) and they echo Dorothy Smith (1987) in her call for another way of thinking about research and building knowledge (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 12). Instead of seeing women’s personal experiences as something that reduces the validity and value of research, we should embrace these narratives and points of view because they offer a path to a deeper understanding and an opportunity to build knowledge (p. 13).

While positivist research advocates argue that the particular standpoint of women lacks objectivity, Abigail Brooks (2007) asserts that women are more likely to be objective. She believes that the male-dominated power structures want to hide the ways in which they oppress the population, in an attempt to maintain the status quo (2007, p. 67). Meanwhile women, out of social and economic necessity, have a double consciousness – an awareness of the majority view, as well as their own perspectives (p. 63). Brooks further adds that because women are an

oppressed group, they don't have the same motivations to twist the truth as someone who is trying to hold on to power might have. Therefore, she asserts, women's narratives are strongly objective interpretations of their everyday world. In other words, women have nothing to gain by lying about their experiences (p. 68).

In searching for new ways to research women's experiences, feminist standpoint theorists advocate for methods that acknowledge the relationship between the researcher and researched, and that include female subjects in the investigative process (Brooks, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007; Sprague & Kobrinowicz, 2004). As feminist historian Joan Wallach Scott explains, "When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subjects (the person who had the experience or the historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence upon which explanation is built" (p. 273). In seeking the experiences of female Members of the Legislature, I hope to create a "bedrock of evidence" upon which further research can be conducted to determine if the communications atmosphere of the legislature is one of the barriers preventing women from seeking political office in Nova Scotia.

## **Methods**

In order to answer the research question of how female Members of the Legislature experience the communications atmosphere in the House of Assembly, it is essential to turn to the women themselves. Therefore, the key research method for this thesis is the qualitative interview, however, it is applied incorporating the principles of feminist participatory research. Joey Sprague (2005) and Alison Jaggar (2007) outline the issues that feminist researchers have with traditional forms of interviewing and field research. Sprague (2005) asserts that traditional interview practices highlight imbalances of race, gender, ethnicity and class in the research

relationship (p. 121). By incorporating strategies that “build on the connection between researcher and researched,” researchers can address these issues (Sprague, 2005, p. 138), but they must be careful to avoid exploitation of the interview subjects, who may report more to the researcher within the context of a relationship than they would with a more distant interviewer (p. 139). This is a new approach for me, but an exciting one, because I have never considered sharing research with participants during the interview process. Traditional research methods would tell us that this might have a negative impact on the validity of the data collected.

However, my own personal theoretical and philosophical base is Critical Theory and Marxist Feminism, and from this perspective, this method makes a lot of sense. I believe it generates strong and useful research because it questions existing structures and power relationships from women’s perspectives. I recognize that there are other issues with government structures in Nova Scotia, particularly the lack of representation of minority races, social classes, gender representations and cultures such as the Mi’Kmaq, African Nova Scotians, Acadians, people living in poverty, and members of the gay/lesbian/bisexual and transgendered communities. My chosen focus is on the issues of gender from women’s point of view however, I sincerely hope that future research will explore issues of equal representation among these – and other - socially marginalized groups.

My research began with a close reading of the Hansard transcripts of all Question Period sessions in the Nova Scotia Legislature from 1998 to 2010. This time period encapsulates the governments of four premiers and three political parties, and also includes most of the women who have served as members of the legislature in Nova Scotia. I feel it is important to explain why the focus is on Question Period. After all, Question Period only accounts for 3.5 hours of the typical week when the legislature is sitting, with the rest of the time being comprised of

elements such as resolutions, Ministerial speeches, budget estimates debate (when a budget is tabled) and less-combative debate on legislation currently before the House. I am focusing on Question Period for two key reasons. First, it is the high theatre of the Legislature, and thus, it is what the members of the press corps are most likely to pay attention to and cover. Raising one's profile as an MLA depends, to arguably a disproportionate level, on exposure and performance during Question Period. The earlier on (higher up in the question order) you ask or answer the questions, the more profile on the political scene.

Second, there is a defined process in preparing for Question Period that brings issues of power and voice into play in a communications sense. For example, only cabinet members of government speak during Question Period, thus gaining opportunity for exposure to the Nova Scotia public. Only the highest-profile ministers (Finance, Health, Education) generally get asked questions in the early moments of Question Period, which affects gender balance and voice. In the opposition ranks, likewise, the profile of the critic determines how high-up in the Question Period order he or she asks questions, and how often she or he may get to ask questions. Generally, during Question Period, the rhetoric is more cutting and the heckling more vocal than during other times of debate in the House. In this way, I would argue that Question Period acts as an amplified microcosm of political life: high-pressure to perform, a distinct "pecking order", and under-representation by women and cultural minorities are accentuated during these 210 minutes per week. The Hansard transcripts were also searched for Speaker's rulings. These are exceptionally rare, with perhaps three or four official rulings in a typical session. Such rulings are sometimes on procedure, but they can incorporate issues of behavior, language and decorum in the House.

From the Hansard transcripts, questions were identified where female MLAs were asking as a critic or answering as a Minister. These were explored for tone, interruptions (which are noted in Hansard) and language. Two examples from Question Period were chosen for each MLA to be interviewed (as outlined below), and video clips were acquired from Nova Scotia Legislative Television Services.

In total, eight women were interviewed, spanning three political parties. Thirteen women were approached, but a combination of tight timelines for my research and the women's very busy schedules limited the number of women who were able to participate. The focus on Question Period also eliminated nine women from qualifying to be interviewed, as they did not participate in Question Period. Also, it was easier to get clips if the timelines were kept to post-2000, which further reduced the list of possible women. Within the scope of qualitative research, the number of women and percentages is not considered important. That said, I did want to seek out the experiences of women across party lines and opposition versus government experiences. The group of women identified accomplishes this, and the eight women represent 37 per cent of all women who ever participated in Question Period, and 26 per cent of the women ever elected in Nova Scotia's history.

I contacted sitting members through their constituency offices, and some former members were reached with the help of party offices. The party office staff was helpful in forwarding my invitation to the former members. I was pleased that all but two of the women who were approached responded to the invitation and were willing to be interviewed. They showed great interest in my research and were keen to help, if they were able. Sadly, as mentioned earlier, some interviews could not be scheduled in the time period I had available. Little travel was

involved, as most women were within close proximity of the Halifax Regional Municipality or they were in the city during the course of my interview timeframe.

In preparation for the interviews, I compiled a list of open-ended questions, with the Question Period clips scheduled to be played as early in the interview as possible, after just a couple of introductory questions. (Please see Appendix A for the list of guiding questions.) Using the video clips was an interesting process, and a source of valuable learning experiences. First of all, the disk player on my computer was not user-friendly and, despite practicing at home, my first interview was interrupted for 10 minutes while I tried to cue up the clips for the MLA. I found myself adjusting the order of the interview questions and timelines a little bit after each interview, in order to insert the clips in the least obtrusive way, and to be responsive to the flow of the conversation. I also removed some questions from post-video clips to just before the clips, because it fit better. I was rewarded with a more natural flow to the interview by the third time. I also asked different questions depending on the direction in which each woman took the conversation. Follow-up questions were added if she introduced an unanticipated stream of discussion, while some questions were removed because they were already answered or didn't make sense in the context of a particular interview.

The reactions to the video clips were sometimes surprising. They ranged from one woman, whom I have known for many years, laughing and saying "hold me!" when she saw herself on the screen to another woman laughing because she was wearing the same suit in the two interviews I had chosen. I must say I'm rather oblivious to these things! What fascinated me the most was the women's self-criticism over their 'performance' in the questions we watched together. The majority of women admitted they usually didn't watch footage of themselves during Question Period. The self-criticism ranged from stumbling over words to not

replying to a ‘zinger’ fired back from the opposing member. Most women seemed a little uncomfortable watching themselves. There was one exception from a seasoned legislator who, when asked how she felt watching the clips, indicated that she felt nothing and it didn’t bring forward any particular thoughts at all. I’m uncertain whether this response was reflective of her earlier admission that she was exhausted on the day of our interview, or whether her long experience in the House had rendered Question Period as a mundane part of the job. Nevertheless, I felt that the videos of Question Period added a truly interesting dimension to the interviews, even though they took a lot of thought and some practice to make them fit into the process without disrupting the flow of the interview. The video clips garnered answers to questions and emotional reactions that reading the text of Hansard or relying solely on memory would never have achieved. It added tremendous depth to the overall voices of the women about their experiences in the House of Assembly.

The interview locations changed too, and, while there was no such thing as a ‘bad’ location, the tone of the conversations and content did reflect where the discussion took place. For example, one interview was conducted at the woman’s home, in her kitchen, surrounded by her dog and cats. It was a far more casual and informal, and conversational-style interview than others that occurred in different office environments. The offices themselves differed from constituency offices to government and caucus spaces. Most locations were completely private, however one or two had other people present nearby. This, too, had an impact on the types of answers and the formality level of the conversations. I believe that in some instances, women held back in how candid they were because of the proximity of others, or other distractions. In general, most women were open with their responses, as they were aware that the responses would be kept confidential. Some women said they didn’t care if their identities were protected

at all, and wondered why I was keeping names in confidence. Others were very concerned with confidentiality, and they seemed somewhat worried about the reaction their responses would get from their colleagues, family or constituents.

Because this is participatory research, where the process is to be collaborative and inclusive, I also shared some of the current research findings with the women, later in the interviews after most of their responses were already recorded. The extent to which I shared what I learned in my readings depended on the circumstances of the interview and where we were going with the conversation. Also the type of research I shared was based on things the woman had already said, for the most part, to either support a point she had made earlier, or to introduce a stream of thought about a subject we had discussed.

The interviews took place between June 21 and July 5, 2011. They ranged in length from 45 minutes to nearly 90 minutes, averaging an hour each. Each interview was recorded, with the participant's written permission. I have enclosed the ethical consent form to interview and record the women and forms were signed for each participant. (Please see Appendix B.) They were transcribed as I went along, because they were scheduled far enough apart that I could keep up with transcription. This was a necessity with my tight project timelines, but it also proved very valuable to me, and helpful in improving my interviews for later discussions because it allowed me to review my techniques early on and make necessary adjustments to later interviews. In listening to the audio recordings of the first three interviews, I came to two key realizations. First, I am an active listener, which is good, but I relied far too heavily on verbal active listening cues, which were almost to the point of being interruptive at times. I resolved to rely more on physical cues such as nodding, eye contact, and listening intently, rather than interspersing so many "yes", "uh-huh" and "wow, that's interesting" moments into the interview.



Secondly, I found that, in my excitement to share what I had learned during those “eureka” moments, I talked way too much. This was usually much further into the interview, near the end, and things seemed to get more comfortable and casual. Also, in two cases, I knew the women, so there was a higher level of comfort from our prior relationships. I was quite embarrassed with how much I talked during two of the interviews. This is about giving a voice to female MLAs, not me. After listening to the first three recordings, I bit my tongue a lot more. I still engaged with the women and shared research, but kept my comments to the minimum and let them do the talking. I also learned that nature abhors a vacuum and I abhor long pauses. That stems to my years working in radio, where “dead air” is reviled. However, I learned to value the pauses, and to let the women gather their thoughts. The reward was that the long pauses were often followed by some very profound admissions or observations. As a researcher, I will remember the interview process for this project and I’m sure it will be helpful in future research undertakings.

Summarized transcripts of the interviews were shared with each participant through email correspondence, and she was invited to provide any feedback she wished. Particularly, I invited the women to share anything that we didn’t touch upon that may have come to mind later. I also assured them that their identities were protected, and I wouldn’t use any parts of the interview that would name the women, or others, however, if there were any parts of particular concern, to flag them for me. The women seemed happy to have this opportunity to reflect and have further input outside of the interview setting. In the end, none of the women got back to me with any feedback, but two of them did write back to say they were happy to have the opportunity to review their remarks. Three women double-checked with me to make sure that real names would not be used.

**A note on identifying the women**

As the women themselves will point out in the data, there is a very real fear of reprisals from colleagues, party members and the public for speaking out about gender issues. Since some of the women who participated in this research are sitting Members of the Legislature, it became imperative to protect their identities.

At the same time, however, it is also important to differentiate between the eight voices. I opted to give each woman a number, for clarity purposes when I am quoting or referring to her. The thought of numbering people is somewhat distasteful to me, but I didn't want to use fake names or letters, lest anyone be tempted to try to infer identity. Numbers seemed the best solution, but I ask that the women forgive me for caving to pragmatism in this case.

In some cases, the need to protect the identity of the women prevents telling as much as I would like to about them, such as their experiences before the legislature, and their life situations. Many of the things they said could not be quoted directly because information in their quotes would likely identify them. I provide as much detail as I can while avoiding making the reader aware of the names of the women.

**Data Analysis**

To analyze the data gathered during the interviews, I applied a technique put forward by Jennifer Attride-Sterling (2001). Attride-Sterling asserts that "there is a need for greater disclosure in qualitative analysis, and for more sophisticated tools to facilitate such analysis" (p. 385). She further points out that, oftentimes, qualitative researchers omit the "how" from accounts of their analysis (p. 386). This model mirrors similar forms of qualitative analysis in grounded theory and frameworks, to cite two examples, however Attride-Sterling models it most

closely to Argumentation Theory (p. 387). The goal of Argumentation Theory is to provide a way of analyzing negotiation processes (p. 387). In Argumentation Theory, the material progresses from data to a warrant to a claim. The claim is the conclusion of an argument, and its validity is established by the data (p. 387). Attride-Sterling applies this model to texts using a model that breaks the data into thematic networks, consisting of: (a) basic themes – the lowest order theme that is a simple premise. Basic themes don't stand alone – they need to be understood within the context of other basic themes; (b) organizing themes are the middle ground, joining basic themes together based on their similarity. The role of organizing themes is to provide deeper understanding of the broader global themes that consist of several organizing themes; (c) global themes encompass the principle images of all of the data. They are intended to “present an argument or a position or assertion about a given issue or reality” (p. 389). Texts can reveal more than one global theme. The basic themes are obtained by breaking down the text, then exploring it and finally integrating it together (p. 390).

For this research, I transcribed the interviews, which became my text. I read through the text, identifying common basic themes (or codes). There were many codes within the text, however, I do not discuss all of them. Instead, I determined that my criteria for inclusion would be only basic themes that were mentioned or discussed by more than one woman, or themes that had significance to my guiding theories. This does not devalue the other experiences shared by the women, but I focused on the most commonly expressed themes and threads of conversation among the women interviewed. I then grouped the codes by their organizing themes. I began with six organizing themes, but realized that two of the themes weren't separate enough to stand alone, and they fit better within other thematic clusters, so they were incorporated into other organizing themes. For example, many of the women identified the basic themes of *tradition*,

*history, male, gendered, sitting, Speaker, MLA, elected, decorum, House, pomp, ceremony* and *rules* in their conversations. These didn't necessarily refer specifically to Question Period, rather, they were in reference to various elements of the Legislature – the building itself, practices within it, and other roles such as committee work and budget debate. I grouped these basic themes into an organizing theme “The Legislature – not Question Period”. It serves to enhance the broader theme that came from this organizing theme, which is “the Nova Scotia Legislature is filled with masculine traditions, practices and structures, many of which can make it an uninviting place for women”. The basic themes expressed by the women support the broader global theme about the masculine nature and alien feel of the Legislature itself. Figure 1 on page 51 demonstrates how the basic, organizing and global themes can be illustrated in a web-like image to demonstrate the connection between each level of the theme. The diagram is based on the demonstration used by Attride-Sterling (2001), p. 388. It shows the basic themes related to Question Period, and how they can be grouped into five organizing themes. In turn, these sets of organizing themes support a global theme, or conclusion, about what the text tells us about Question Period.

By using Attride-Sterling's (2001) thematic network model, we can easily trace my key research findings to the text and see how the data was derived from the interviews with the women.

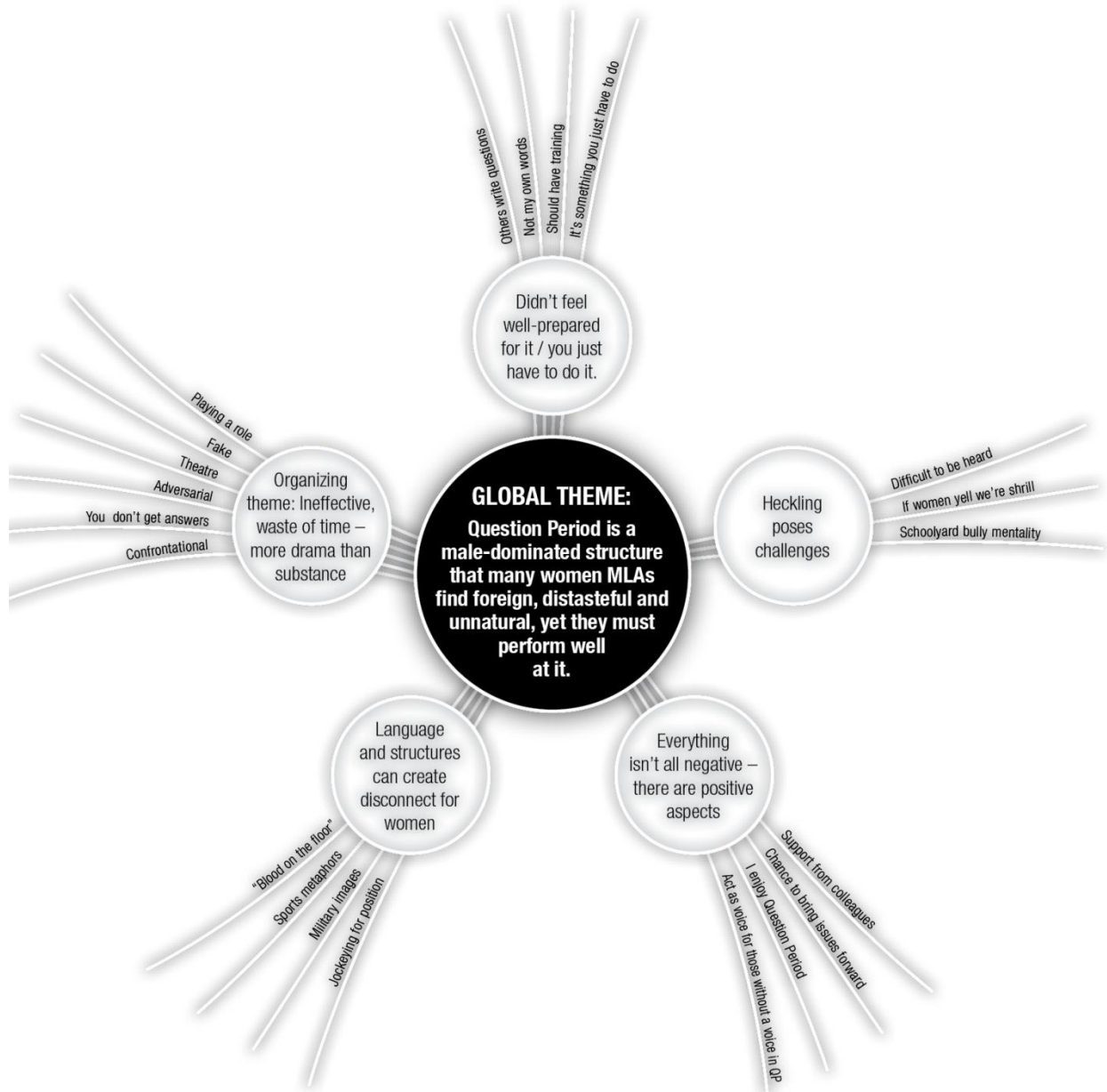


Figure 1: Graphic interpretation of Jennifer Attride-Sterling's (2001) thematic network model showing the basic, organizing and global themes that are used to organize qualitative interview data.

#### **Chapter Four: “Blood on the floor!”: The good, bad and ugly of the Legislature**

In this section I will present to you the experiences of the women interviewed, often in their own words. I will provide detailed data, the women’s stories, and my reaction and interpretation for each of the four organizing themes noted in Chapter Three:

1. The Legislature (excluding Question period)
2. Question Period
3. Society’s expectations
4. Women’s equality in the political sphere

In the first section, The Legislature (excluding Question Period), I will share what the women interviewed said about Province House, the Legislature experience in general, and the traditions and practices of this institution. Because Question Period was a particular focus of my research, I have reserved an organizing theme just for this subject, which is found in the second section of this chapter. The third section discusses society’s expectations of women and female MLAs, and how the women interviewed experienced these expectations. The final section, titled “Equality for women in the political sphere”, explores the female MLAs’ thoughts on their gendered experiences as elected members in the House of Assembly, their thoughts on the state of women’s equality in Nova Scotia politics, and their hopes for the future.

**The Legislature (excluding Question Period)**

Figure 2. A statue of Joseph Howe, one of the founders of responsible government in Nova Scotia, stands watch over the Nova Scotia Legislature. (Photo by author.)

Province House, in which the House of Assembly sits, is a true historic gem in Nova Scotia. One just has to read the brochure on Province House to get a sense of the grandeur of the building and its history:

Province House, in which the Nova Scotia Legislature has met every year since February 1819, is Canada's oldest seat of government. This architectural gem is one of the finest examples of Palladian style in North America. The lofty halls and bold stature of other provincial capitols might dwarf Province House but none can compete with it for classic proportion and elegance of

design. As a landmark in the constitutional evolution of Canada, it has been said that more history has been made within these four walls than in all other legislatures combined (Province of Nova Scotia, p. 3)

Given the mental image that this description conjures, it is not surprising that many of the basic themes expressed by the women interviewed on the subject of the Legislature – other than Question Period – involved references to tradition, history, pomp, and ceremony. The basic themes expressed by the women also included male, gendered, sitting, Speaker, MLA, elected, decorum, House, and rules. Many of the women I interviewed expressed feeling very proud when they entered the Legislature for the first time as an elected member. All of the women indicated that they also felt a level of anxiety or nervousness. Woman #4 said she felt anxiety about whether or not she would be able to perform up to expectations. “Do I know how to do this? I’m sure everybody feels that – what’s going to be required of me?” The physical atmosphere of the Legislature was also described by many women, who said it was “historic” and a “momentous” place. Woman #5 said she really felt the history when she entered the Legislature for the first time:

I was very much in awe of the opportunity. I almost felt surrounded by the ghosts of legislators past, and was literally pinching myself under the desk, hardly able to believe that, you know having watched legislative TV, and listening to reports in the media, that I now would have a part to play in making the decision-making for Nova Scotia as broadly-based and as informed as possible



Woman # 6 also felt a little overwhelmed with the sense of history. She said, “The first day that I walked into the House as an MLA I was very intrigued with Province House itself and it’s a very historic chamber and I was just kind of wowed and humbled by the fact that I was even standing in the Chamber”. She also remembers being surprised at feeling underwhelmed when she looked across at the government ranks of the day:

I’m seeing Government for the very first time, all those individuals on the other side of the House and what went through my mind was ‘That’s Government?’...because I think most of us think that Government is bigger than it actually is. So for the first time I was actually looking across the room at 20-some-odd individuals who all looked relatively normal and ordinary, and they didn’t look so large and ominous and powerful.

The woman further explained that she had spent her life imagining government as a big machine-like object, and to sit in opposition and look at the ordinary people sitting across from her was a moment of awareness for her. She said it helped her feel a little more at ease sitting in the Legislature. She didn’t remark on the gendered nature of what she was looking at when she looked across at the government: most of the members opposite were men. Neither this MLA, nor her female colleagues, would have seen much of a representation of themselves in the faces across the floor.

The physical space in the Legislature was something which Woman #7 described as being more intimidating than some of her visits to foreign countries. She said, “It’s not a familiar environment and it’s very formal. You have all the old wooden desks and the very

ornate, the great big huge pictures of...dead white men, and it's...a very different environment from where I had spent my life". That said, the same MLA said she was also excited to be there and was looking forward to doing the things she had come to the legislature to do. Woman #2 also felt that she was entering a male-dominated place:

It's a man's world, because the majority of people in there are men... You know right off the bat, if you were a woman who was used to working in any job situation where you are working with women all the time, and then you're working with men, then you're thrown into this whole...and if you weren't a team player before. That's what I used to think that it's like a sports team and there's two different teams.

The perception that the legislature can be more difficult for female members was shared with Woman #4, who said she felt that it was not one particular thing that made it more challenging for female MLAs, rather, it was a universal truth, in her experience: "You were asking if there were ways within the legislature if I feel it's harder being a woman. And I think in general it is. I think we take a back seat pretty much." Woman #8 also felt intimidated when she entered the Chamber as a new MLA, because the House was such an unfamiliar place, and she had only met many of her caucus colleagues a few weeks prior to the legislative session. As a cabinet minister, she was mostly concerned with getting the job done in a way that didn't cause personal embarrassment: "I hoped I would be able to get through whatever I had to get through, without looking terribly foolish." Member #5 also felt that the Legislature and its structures were very male-dominated:

I think you know, if we're talking about gender issues, certainly how the process and structure and operations of government are very much male-dominated. And that perhaps we needed to throw a light on the rationale for that. Perhaps it's just because it was always that way.

The member said she had given much thought to why the Legislature felt so male-dominated and unwelcoming to women, but she said she couldn't decide on one particular reason. Most of the women shared the sense that although the structures and processes were male-oriented, and that men generally did better in the Legislature, there wasn't much that could be done to change the structures. They also seemed to feel that if change *could* happen, it was not going to happen any time in the near future. The feelings that the women described of being intimidated and not feeling at home in the Legislature reflect many of the themes in feminist organizational theory, where women are very much placed on the outside looking in, and the men in organizations form a hegemonic network into which it can be very difficult to obtain entry.

Some of the women mused about the contrast between the historic and staid setting and the type of behavior that often plays out in the House of Assembly. Woman #6 said she was somewhat surprised by the lack of decorum in the Legislature, given the dignified and storied setting:

You know, you come into this historic chamber, with so much history...and if those walls could only talk, and when you realize that we're all very ordinary human beings that are sitting around the table in our various places...The decorum, you know, for all the pomp and ceremony that comes with that historic chamber – the

grand entrance of the Lieutenant Governor and the opening of the House – and then you see members on all sides of the House acting...immature sometimes...there's so much disrespect from some of us that sit around the tables to the historic presence of the chamber. Then again, we're all very ordinary and we're all very human.

According to the women interviewed for this thesis, the Nova Scotia House of Assembly, Canada's oldest (Nova Scotia Legislature, 2011), is filled with history and a sense of occasion and formality. Much of the tradition and practice in this storied place is male-dominated, making it an intimidating and unwelcoming place for female MLAs. As feminist organizational theory explains, the narratives and traditions of an organization can serve to marginalize women and entrench the male hegemony. As Morgan (2006) details, some of the deeply held structures in an organization are linked to the moment in time in which the organization came into being. Since the House of Assembly itself is over 250 years old, its origins clearly date back to a time when men held the bulk of power in society. The Legislature building itself will soon be 200 years old. Anyone who has walked through its oversized main entry doors and up its sweeping grand staircase can attest to the atmosphere one is encountering when entering Province House. Sitting the chamber, an MLA looks up to see a lofty gallery of green bench seats and high windows flanking an ornately patterned white ceiling. At every corner is ornate and often original decor. The tradition extends to some of the dress worn in the Legislature itself. The Speaker and Legislative Clerks wear robes, and they can – and do – sport either tri-corner hats or top hats for special occasions. There is a dress code for all MLAs, including women, that requires that a jacket be worn. Many female MLAs with whom I've spoken over the years have

indicated that the requirement that they wear jackets, regardless of the season and heat level in Province House (there is no air conditioning), is particularly onerous. Women experiencing hot flashes, specifically, have truly struggled with the masculine dress-code.

It is interesting to note, all of that said, that some of the women recognized that the building is populated by “very ordinary” people. This realization seemed to help many of the women come to terms with initial intimidation and anxiety that they felt when they first entered the House of Assembly as elected members. However, as they express in the next section, nothing really prepared them for the rigors and male-dominated traditions of Question Period.

### **Question Period**

Question Period had the most robust set of data, which is not surprising, because a large portion of each interview, including two video clips, focused on the dynamics of Question Period. This was intentional. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Question Period is the most combative and arguably the most challenging aspect of the processes within the Nova Scotia Legislature. My observations while working in a caucus office, watching how female MLAs engaged with Questions Period was the key reason for undertaking this research. Code words included Question Period, confrontation, heckling, debate, Speaker, partisan, theatre, drama, rhetoric, adversarial, aggressive, tone, ineffective and intimidating. The thoughts and experiences expressed by the women interviewed reflect many of the feminist communication and feminist organizational theories outlined earlier in this thesis. For example, the feeling of many women that Question Period was unnatural and went against their normal ways of communicating supports theories by Campbell (1971, 1995, 1998), Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles (1996), Jamieson (1995), Vasby-Anderson (1999) and others. Meanwhile, the women’s experiences

feeling targeted for being women, and their perception that they often need to use more aggressive or masculine traits than they would normally use, reflect the organizational theory literature including the theories put forward by Nichols (1993), Mumby & Putnam (1992), Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) and DuToit (2006). The women interviewed did not hold back on their thoughts about Question Period. For the most part, women's views on Question Period range from it being a waste of time and ineffective to being a dreaded part of their role as MLA because of its confrontational nature.

On the subject of the effectiveness – or lack thereof – of Question period, Woman #1 said that it is not her favourite thing to do. She says that might surprise some people, because she's a fairly confident person. However, she finds Question Period a challenging time because of the confrontation and the adversarial environment:

I'm a pretty gutsy person anyway and you know...give me something to do, and I'll do it. But I remember that particular scenario and I remember Question Period. It was my least favourite thing to do...I am not an adversarial kind of person. I can be assertive, aggressive if I have to be, but assertive is a better way than sort of...I find Question Period is almost a point of being an agitation. That's the whole goal, is to agitate the other side into screwing up. I don't like that. I'm a collaborative type person and I've always said that.

Watching Question Period, it's easy to see what Woman #1 means. When the Speaker utters the words "Orders of the Day: Questions put by Members to Ministers" the change in atmosphere in the Legislature chamber is palpable. Everyone on the Government and Opposition side are on

alert, ready to give and receive “zingers” and return accusations or comments with witty retorts. This atmosphere was alluded to or outright described by some of the women as being played more like a game than an element of responsible government in Nova Scotia. Woman #6, after watching the clips of herself during Question Period was bemused by some retorts she offered an acidic Minister. She smiled at the thought of joining in on the “game”, commenting that:

It’s interesting to look back, for sure. You know, questions get asked, no real answers are provided. Maybe I saw myself getting a bit into the theatrics and kind of buying into the ...um theatrics on the other side. And you know you get challenged back, and so you’re next...comment or question you come back in that same tone that you were provided with, you know, with that answer that wasn’t really an answer. So I think we get caught up in the dynamics of that energy...

The theme of theatrics is one often repeated by the women. Woman #4 admitted that she has seldom watched clips of herself asking questions because she doesn’t enjoy Question Period. She said:

Probably of everything that I do as an MLA, that’s my least favourite role. And it’s partly because it’s more drama than substance a lot of times. Even if you have a good question, it’s how you deliver it and how...well-spoken you are or quick or sharp-witted. A lot of it has to do with being quick on a comeback, right?

The reason why Question Period is so theatrical is that opposition parties are doing their best to gain media coverage for issues they raise, while Government is often trying to defend its actions and put their own positive spin on issues. This focus on performance often ramps up the rhetoric in the House, and the aggressive tone. Many women noted this. Woman #8 said she felt that Question Period was for show, and the debate didn't represent reality. She said that one of the biggest surprises to her was how the members would debate vehemently back and forth, and be friendly outside of the Chamber:

I was surprised at the difference between the animosity that's displayed on the floor of the House versus the friendliness as you go to the lunch room. (laughs) Or you know, out in the hallway, or something like that. I had not realized the degree to which the so-called debates or Question Period are essentially fake...I adjusted to it very quickly. It was a surprise but on the other hand, I was glad it was fake, because I'm not a particularly virulent person myself, and – some people may not believe that...I adjusted to it very well, and in very short order, I understood that we were acting and that it was a role and it was a role that I hoped I would learn to play.

Woman #7 also referred to Question Period as being “theatre”, and she said that element of the theatrical connected with all the other male-dominated traditions and structures of the Legislature itself. Woman #5 also feels that little is actually accomplished in Question Period, and likens it to an “elaborate play going on. Everybody has a role, certain expectations for opposition and Government”.



Just because the women didn't seem to appreciate that 60 or 90 minutes of their day was devoted to theatre and "drama versus substance", doesn't mean they didn't sometimes get caught up in the drama unfolding around them. Woman #6 also admitted to sometimes getting caught up in the drama that is Question Period, when she saw herself getting animated in the video clips of herself. The question she asked was one from her constituency, and she explained that the issue was something about which she was very passionate. She said:

I saw myself there getting a bit into the theatrics and kind of buying into the ...theatrics on the other side. And you know, you get challenged back, and so your next, your next comment or question you come back in that same tone that you were provided with, you know, with the answer that wasn't really an answer.

The atmosphere of theatre actually helped Woman #8 to cope with her nerves as a fairly inexperienced cabinet minister. She likened her comportment to playing a role, and considered some of her dress as a costume, of sorts:

My glasses are kind of like my suit of armour. So were shoulder pads. So were shoes with heels. And so, to do my job where I thought...to hide what I perceived as my weaknesses, I always had to dress the part. And I believe that that worked for me. I believe that many people thought I was colder and harder and meaner than I actually was. But...I needed that...You have to find a way to be harder than you actually may be.

In addition, Woman #3 said that she used the notion of Question Period as theatre to her advantage. Feeling nervous about her first session of the Legislature, as a new MLA, she turned to an actor's trick to get through the Question Period:

There's a whole theory that if you're uncomfortable doing something, you act as if it's the normal thing to do. So I decided that I was playing the role of an MLA and that sort of got me through the first part of it, until I felt more comfortable.

Along with the theme of Question Period being theatre comes the frustration of many women that this session, three times a week, seldom accomplished much actual work. Many of the women said they felt agitation and a sense that there were so many other, more important, things they could be doing with their time. Woman #1 felt somewhat resentful at having to sit through Question Period when there was important work to be done:

I find Question Period, to me, is the least productive time in the Legislature. Because it just is...I say productive in a way that I think is productive. I know things are getting done, because that's what their goal is – to get a snippet in the newspaper or have something to hold against somebody later. But I don't know...I just would tune it out.

Woman #1 also said that Question Period would be far more palatable to her if the focus was on actually getting good information and giving people good government. She felt that Question Period is primarily “a farce”:

It's not about getting information that's good quality information to share with Nova Scotians or even to get to the bottom and the

heart of something so that a good decision can be made. It's never, ever about that.

It's often said among the politicians and staff working around the Legislature that it's called Question Period, not "Answer Period". It often becomes about posturing for political gain than actually engaging in genuine discourse about the issues. Because the media is watching, and positive earned media is critical to the opposition and government alike, there is a lot of pressure to perform and gain media attention. Many of the women felt that the men tended to relish Question Period, and perform better than the women. This is supported by the feminine rhetorical style theory, which would indicate that most women would not enjoy the argumentative debate-styled theatrics. Not all women said that they minded the theatre playing out in front of them, or the cut-and-thrust of debate. Woman #2 echoed the sentiment of Woman #1 saying that the atmosphere of Question Period really didn't bother her, and in fact, sometimes she enjoyed the back-and-forth. Like many of the women interviewed, she said that the only thing about Question Period that really bothered her was that the work didn't get done. She said:

...You only have to see it for a few hours to figure out how it's going to go down...You know...they could have been sitting there as quiet as church mice, and still the work wouldn't get done. So to me it's the end result.

Part of the atmosphere and animosity in Question Period stems from political partisanship among members. Following the 2009 election, when the New Democratic Party formed its first government in Nova Scotia, the rancor in the Question Periods was palpable. This kind of acrimony among members bothered Woman #6, who felt that a lot more could get accomplished if the animosity between political parties was left at the door. Having come to the Legislature

from a bitterly contested election battle in her constituency, she felt that many members from other parties were hostile to her, and heckled more frequently because of bitter feelings over the election result. She said:

It's odd because we were in these different political circles and we just fight so hard not get along, it seems. It's just...there's so much work to be done, and electioneering should be kept to elections. And in-between times, when we're put in the role of leaders of our communities, spokespeople, and we find ourselves, whether it's in government or opposition...we really owe it to our constituents to really, to take off the political striped hat and really work together to get things done...but we don't and that's the unfortunate part.

Woman #7 also believes that Question Period has evolved to include fewer and fewer questions that reflect the concerns and voices of Nova Scotians in general. Rather, the questions are often generated by lobbying by interest groups, in a very politicized environment. She feels that:

...Opposition parties are, I think, on some level, hostage – not literally, but they're dependent...opposition parties have a fair amount of dependence now on interest groups bringing their issue to the government and they become the vehicle to put pressure on a minister, on a government, on a department. That wasn't the way it was maybe 25 or 30 years ago. It's a very different...politics has changed a lot.

This switch to Question Period questions often representing the voice of interest groups more so than grass-roots questions may also contribute to the adversarial feel of Question Period. If an

organization, such as a group representing businesses, or a union, brings enough members to the House of Assembly, the opposition will usually ask at least one question about their particular issue or cause. The presence of the group members in the gallery often ramps up an already aggressive Question Period. Parties who ask the questions are attempting to buy social capital with the interest groups, while Government attempts to downplay the issue or take it from the floor of the House. Labour bargaining or strike action are common examples of issues that are raised during Question Period that Government is not really in a position to debate openly, due to contract negotiations. This inability to truly answer questions, even if a Minister wished to, causes much heated debate from the opposition side.

In the same theme of answering questions, while opposition members will often accuse the government members of deliberately not providing answers, Woman #8, from her experience on the government side, said she honestly did try to answer questions respectfully. She says she tried to listen to, and give respectful answers to questions posed to her, however, it depended on how it was asked. She explained, laughing as she said: “I really did try a lot of the time to answer the questions. But it depended on how sincere the ‘ask’ was...If you know that it’s a bullshit question, then you don’t feel so bad about giving a bullshit answer...”

Many of the women who discussed their feelings that Question Period is ineffective and a waste of time indicated that other processes such as committee work, budget estimates debates, and bill debates, are much less contentious, are far more productive. Looking back to the feminine rhetorical theory discussed in Chapter Two, it makes sense that the more collaborative processes of the Legislature would appeal to most women. Committees, such as Public Accounts, often deal with contentious issues, but because government staff is giving testimony and answering questions, the political rhetoric is often ramped down and the forum does not really

invite argumentation and debate tactics. The tone is usually cordial to staff, most MLAs recognizing that they are public servants and not politicians. The questions are usually conversational, and there is a little more time to ask – and answer – the question. The staff are usually the experts on a subject area, so they are often able to provide more detailed responses to the MLAs on the committee. Sometimes, committees invite members of organizations or the public to provide information. For example, the Community Services committee held a poverty forum and a family violence forum in 2004 where people living in poverty and women who had experienced domestic abuse gave very powerful testimony (Nova Scotia Legislature, 2011b). As the feminist communication theory tells us, this kind of forum would be far more effective and comfortable for female MLAs, and it is something that would not happen on the floor of the Legislature, especially during Question Period. These more constructive processes appeal to Woman #4 far more than Question Period, and she feels those committee and other debates get far more accomplished for Nova Scotians. She said:

I feel like I'm part of a constructive process. That, I like, because we're...adding our voice to the debate and being constructive. But Question Period just highlights probably all the elements of the legislature that are more masculine and a little less, they're a bit distasteful, quite frankly. That's a good way to put it.

Woman #5 felt the same way about the other functions of the House. She explained that the work done in committees or even in budget estimates debate is more collegial, and much thought is put into it by members from all sides. This reflects the theories of Rakow and Wackwitz (2004) on women's voice and representation, and the theories of Dow and Tonn (1993) who discuss the importance and value of experiential knowledge – something that the female MLAs could

support and encourage in a committee setting versus in the combative nature of Question Period. This perspective from the women interviewed also demonstrates the point made by Blankenship and Robson (1995), that women are likely to enter public office in order to affect change. Meyer's (2007) theories about feminine invitational rhetoric and its value of listening to others and not passing judgement would also apply to the committee work. Woman #4 expressed her preference of this more collaborative communication environment, saying:

I find some of the best discussion and analysis and decision-making happen at the standing committee or some of the other committee-level work, where you actually get a chance to put an issue on the table and talk about all different aspects of it, and perhaps move forward in terms of your understanding of it and you know, where government needs to go.

It is not surprising, in many ways, that the women prefer committee work or other forms of debate in the House to Question Period. Committees are often far less combative, the media is not always there, so rhetoric and debate levels are lower, and often decisions come from committees with all-party support. As mentioned above, for those who lean more to collaboration than argumentation and debate, this is a far less intimidating setting. As we will explore next, Question Period, by contrast, leads women to feel self-conscious and that they are not performing at their best.

It was remarkable to me how many of the women interviewed expressed a level of embarrassment or being self-conscious watching themselves in the Question Period clips. Many were also surprisingly critical or self-conscious about their performance. More than one indicated that they felt they could have done better, or that if they had asked the question now,

with more experience under their belts, they would do it different. Woman #4 mused that perhaps some people don't perform well in Question Period because of the infrequent sittings of the Legislature in recent years. She says it's not a normal part of life as an MLA. She said:

So...it just doesn't feel as natural and I don't know if other women feel that way or it might just personally be my personality, but...so when I see it sometimes I feel a little bit uncomfortable to watch that, because I feel, especially after (so many) years in the House, and this is something that I've said numerous times...that we sit such a short period of time.

In discussing how they felt about their performance during Question Period, a lot of the women also said that they sometimes felt they could have been better-prepared. Woman #1 said she didn't have any training, and felt that her colleagues just assumed she could handle Question Period because she's a naturally confident person on the outside. However she felt she was "ill-prepared" and was really proud that she was able to pull it off with so little support in getting ready for Question Period. She felt quite self-conscious of how she did in the two Question Period clips, expressing that: "I guess I'm probably more critical of myself, because you often wonder – how did that come off? And now, you know, I got to see it. It's probably best that we don't get to watch ourselves all the time." Woman #4 also felt that she could have had more training going in as a new MLA, given the amount of priority placed on performance during Question Period. "You've got to do it as well as you can. What we should have is training...and I think there should be training. Perhaps other caucuses do it."

Another factor mentioned that sometimes made the women feel they could have done better in Question Period is the practice of having questions written for you by research staff.



The practice is often to have caucus research staff write questions for their critics, and other MLAs asking questions in the staff person's research area. MLAs usually have the opportunity to read and edit questions in advance of Question Period, but sometimes in late-breaking issues, they may not have much time to prepare or review the question. MLAs often write their own local constituency questions, but all women discussed having staff writing material for them, to varying degrees. Woman #6 said she sometimes struggled to deliver the words on the page in front of her:

It's not your own words. And...around the caucus table, just before Question Period...members would offer some critiquing before it was actually signed off on as a "go". But still, at the end of the day, they weren't your words, and you're reading them from a script, and I notice I fumbled a few words, not pausing in the right spots, so you get caught up in.

Woman #4 said she would re-write questions a little because she wasn't comfortable delivering what was written for her. She says that often, staff would write barbs and shots at the opposite party into her questions, which she usually removed because "I just, I don't want to. What's the point of that? It's like throwing on a blanket of negativity or something like that. No, I think Question Period is important and I just try to do the best I can." She expressed a lot of self-doubt over her performance in Question Period because she didn't like tossing out barbs and snide comments at the opposite party, which reflects the feminine rhetorical style theoretical framework discussed earlier in this chapter. Woman #3 says she likes to rehearse her questions so she's not reading them "cold", and she doesn't want to rely on reading from the paper. "I'm not wild about the bob down to my paper thing and I like it much better when I can just ask a

question straight on. She says she has started writing or re-writing her questions in order to feel more comfortable with them. Woman #1 also doesn't like having questions written for her, feeling she does better when she knows the issues better and is more passionate about them. "When I think about the questions being prepared for us, we are not really involved in forming the questions that we're being asked to stand and put forward. And I think that's a shame." She says that she prefers her own questions over "regurgitated" ones, and finds she's better on her feet and more confident when she knows the material.

While many of the women indicated having a distaste for Question Period, most of them spoke about it simply being the reality of the Legislature, and something that all members have to just learn to deal with. Woman #2 said she got through Question Period by just going in with the attitude of getting the job done. "You stand up and off you go. You've got a job to do, and you do it. Just the mechanics of it." Woman #4 also sees Question Period as something each MLA just has to do. "It's part and parcel of what we have to do and Question Period is certainly seen as, I mean that's all the media is interested in, so it's seen, especially in opposition...as your chance to make your mark. She adds that she doesn't have any particular coping mechanisms for Question Period:

You just try to go out and be confident and rise when your turn comes and do your thing. I will say that I don't get as nervous about it now. In the past, it would be...'Oh my God, my time is coming, my question is coming!' You'd really be struggling and getting ready and I think I'm more relaxed about it now.

While all of the women expressed similar observations about the female-unfriendly nature and the masculine practices of Question Period, most of them felt it was not going to change any time

soon. They expressed that the traditions are too long-standing and there aren't enough women elected to give momentum to reforms. That leaves female MLAs with no real choices at all, because they must play – and succeed – at the men's game. Woman #7 said that like it or not, until the structures of the Legislature change, women just have to find a way to function in Question Period. It's expected by your party, and if you are to succeed as an MLA, you need to be able to compete:

If you want to go into our legislature and be like, 20% of the House population and you can't participate in a strong, direct, competitive way, you will not succeed. You will be a voice that will not be heard. And if you're a voice that's not heard, then you're not an effective member, right?

What Woman #7 expresses above is symbolic of the odd ratio of actual time spent on Question Period versus the rest of the job of an MLA, and the inverse-proportion of emphasis placed on performing well in Question Period. Because of this perceived need to perform, which all of the women interviewed expressed, the tension and anxiety is greater for this part of their daily Legislature routine. Woman #8 said that while she may have appeared collected and confident in Question Period, she had to make a deliberate attempt to remain calm and not let others know just how anxious she felt. She said:

I thought a lot about Question Period, myself, and I tried to prepare for it emotionally, and I had my own way of trying to deal with things. Many times it was through humour, not usually...I don't believe it was ever inappropriate humour, but I tried also to give

answers that weren't just part of the formula 30-seconds message that they tell you to recite all the time, because I hated doing that.

Many of the women also mentioned the practice of heckling in the Legislature, especially during Question Period. Most of the women spontaneously spoke about heckling in response to watching the video or asking them how they felt about Question Period. In two cases, I asked them specifically about heckling. Heckling is a long-standing parliamentary tradition, and often it's the questions with much heckling, noise or some kind of witty verbal swordplay that capture the attention of the media. The more robust and heated the exchange on the floor of the House during Question Period, the more media coverage a member or members will get. This applies to both opposition and government members, for a quick and forceful response can be as enthralling as a combative question. Heckling often raises the noise level in the House of Assembly very quickly, to almost deafening levels if things get really heated. For women in particular, being heard by the Speaker and anyone else watching can be very difficult in this kind of communications environment. The microphones in front of members are for recording MLAs for Hansard transcripts and the video recordings: they do not provide any kind of amplification within the House. As Campbell (1971), Carlin and Winfrey (2009) and other feminist communication scholars will point out, for women, being heard is half the battle. It's so easy to lose your audience as a woman. If a woman raises her voice, she is shrill. Higher female voices don't carry as well as deeper male voices, so any additional background noise gets very problematic. Woman #3 describes the challenge that female members experience when trying to speak over the din of the heckling:

It can be a little intimidating in there...particularly if you function best in a non-confrontational environment...And also because when

it gets loud in there, your natural inclination is to speak louder.

Well, for a woman with a thin, fairly high voice, that's not a good plan, because I'll just end up sounding shrill, right? So if there's a lot of noise going on, I'll just stop and look at the Speaker and wait until things quiet down.

Sometimes the Speaker intervenes and sometimes he or she doesn't. As Woman #2 said, some days you wonder if the Speaker is even there. It depends on the person sitting in the Speaker's chair, but some women felt that the Speaker just doesn't realize how difficult the noise has become. The reality of the matter is that if you're a female MLA with a softer voice, if you can't be heard, if the noise is not under control, you are being prevented from having your voice heard and doing your job as an MLA and advocate. As Blankenship and Robson (1995) point out, women who seek and are elected to political office are often very interested in moving women's issues forward. The research into the British context by Bird (2005), Allen and Dean (2008) and Lovenduski and Norris (2003) all point to the key fact that female members are far more likely to bring forward issues affecting women, and to ask questions about women's issues than their male counterparts. Anything in the Legislature that interferes with the ability of women to rise and be heard, and to effectively do their work has a direct impact on the ability of all women to enjoy more robust representation in the House of Assembly. In other words, it is a form of institutional misogyny. Many of the women interviewed expressed feeling that they were not able to function as well as they could because of heckling. Woman #1 said that some of the heckling could be very distracting and it reminded her of another place where yelling at one another is common. She said: "They get so loud that they start to yell, and I found too that some of the younger ones... they've come in – almost schoolyard bullies mentality. I don't like it. I

really don't like it." Aggressive heckling particularly bothered Woman #6 because when she was able to have a question during Question Period, it was always an important issue that she felt needed to be addressed in the House. She felt as though nobody on the other side was even listening to anything she had to say. She felt it impeded her ability to function effectively in the House as a representative for her community. She said:

[It's] sad, when you're sitting there with the want to really do the public service by bringing issues to the forefront through the vehicle of Question Period. But in your heart of hearts, when you're sitting there, you're thinking that nobody's really listening to this on the other side. They really could give two hoots about the real question. And so this is just going out there in the ethers and nothing's going to happen.

Speakers do intervene when comments made while heckling cross the line or propriety, for example, if the comment uses unparliamentary language. For example, profanity or calling someone a "liar" is not parliamentary language. But the Speaker may not hear an offensive comment. That can create very awkward moments for members who may hear a comment that causes offense. Two of the women interviewed said they did not feel that they could stand on their feet and call attention to the comments, but one woman interviewed said there was at least one occasion when she wished she had stood up the moment she heard a comment. The incident happened when the House was not full, as it was later in the day's proceedings. One member made a comment that deeply offended another, and that was not only unparliamentary, it was socially unacceptable. While the offended member did stand in their place and say something, the woman didn't. Without other people coming forward, it became a case of one person's word

against another. The woman told me she regretted not standing up immediately and saying what she heard, but she was too intimidated to do so. She indicated that she wished more members would rise and bring forward vicious comments to the Speaker.<sup>1</sup>

Another situation involves Woman #3, who recalls a time when adversarial comments went beyond the heat of the moment in the House and she felt bullied by another member. She had made a comment during debate and it angered another member, who later told her, outside of the Chamber that “actions have consequences” and indicated that “We’ve been nice to you, but we won’t be anymore.” She felt particularly threatened because the male member made references to her personal life as well, and then she recalled she had heard the same member make the same comment to another female MLA during an earlier session. “And I thought ‘you’ve just crossed a line, buddy’ and it was clear to me that (he) was doing this to yet another woman.” She says she felt the comment was even more threatening because the only two times she heard the member use it, it was aimed at female members. Woman #3 was not the only woman interviewed to specifically name that particular member, whom other MLAs interviewed categorized as a bully, particularly with women.

Woman #6 has also felt targeted during debate because of her gender, through noise levels and heckling intensity getting worse when she – and other women – were speaking. She said:

I was surprised, but not surprised, at the number of hecklers in the background, and what used to go through my mind, sitting there...as a woman, thinking how some of us were...we were picked on more than others, for lack of a better word...picked on, I guess, and sometimes I felt it was because I was a woman.

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<sup>1</sup> I have not used this member’s number, in order to further protect her identity on this issue.

Woman #2 believes that most forms of heckling have a place in parliamentary tradition, but comments shouldn't be brought down to such a personal or offensive level. She felt that there's a difference between heckling and letting things get out of hand. For example:

You shouldn't be insulting people. But I think that it's okay to, if somebody asks a question and you just think it's wrong to say 'No, you are wrong, that's wrong'. I don't think...you don't want to be screaming it, but I think it's part of the way it operates in there. I don't think that you should be nasty to people. You can say things that are really hurtful.

Woman #2 admits that sometimes heckling can be intended to stop MLAs from having their say in the House, whether it's coming from the opposition or governing party. However, she thinks that many times, heckling is a tool to break the monotony, especially when some members don't have questions that day, or Ministers aren't getting many questions. She explains: "Maybe...it just keeps them perked up or it keeps them awake, you know? If it was quiet in there the whole time?...I think some people would fall asleep. And I have seen people sleeping in there."

The construct of heckling in the Legislature, especially during Question Period, also leads to an interesting phenomenon of women saying things and acting in a way they wouldn't normally do. Many of the women interviewed touched on getting caught up in the tone and atmosphere and perhaps snapping back and saying something that would normally be completely out of character. Woman #1 recalls hearing surprising things come out of colleagues' mouths:

When (members) get ugly - and they do -...then I find that our women do, and I think it's natural, although I'd like to think that I wouldn't, but who knows? They almost...they become more



personal. They don't know how else to handle it so they say something sort of snide back that...really is not meant to be said in the Chamber. You know, 'clean the wax out of your ears'....I find it almost pushes them to go into a place that they normally wouldn't ever go. But that environment brings it out. Pushes and pushes and pushes until all of a sudden you pop! You've said something that you wouldn't normally say.

What Woman #1 is describing is women adopting a more aggressive, masculine form of communicating when they are pushed too hard by heckling and pugnacious behaviour. Woman #2 agrees that women sometimes act out of character, in the heat of the moment. She describes members sometimes reacting to heckling with good-natured humour, and other times: "You know, sometimes you can get caught up in it. And it just becomes too much and you're not really getting anywhere..." Woman #4 said that parties often encourage members to ramp up the aggression during Question Period, and, consciously or unconsciously, positive reinforcement is used to encourage members to engage in robust retorts. She explains that:

I don't usually have any barbs. Maybe if I feel really strongly about something or I feel I'm attacked on the other side, maybe a little bit. But what's funny is if you fight back, or bark something back...that's when you get tons of kudos from your colleagues.

They love it.

It's interesting to note that while talking about the aggressive style of debate in the Question Period, many of the women got more animated during their interviews. They used their hands more when talking, they sat up straighter and moved around more in their seats while discussing

the tone of Question Period, and particularly the subject of heckling. Woman #3 drew on her Question Period vigour in referring to aggressive heckling by members across the floor. At one point, referring to offending members who heckled during one of the video questions, she said: “There are members opposite who should think twice about yelling at me during Question Period because if it happens much more, I will nail them.” This kind of sentiment reflects what the feminist organizational theorists say about women in organizations often needing to take on more masculine traits in order to fit in and function in the male-dominated environment. Like the women in the 40’s and 50s who wore masculine clothing and attempted to use sports language (Nichols, 1993), the MLAs interviewed felt that sometimes they were drawn into the masculine, more aggressive, tone of Question Period.

Another common theme among the women was feeling that they experienced things differently than men in the Legislature, and in Question Period in particular. Some of this feeling of disconnect came from not sharing common language use or life experience with many of their male colleagues. With so many men having dominated the numbers within the Legislature for over 250 years, discussion often migrates to issues of sports and military terminology. This is a situation explained by Nichols (1993) from an organizational theory standpoint. Deetz (2001) also explains how marginalized groups are often treated as the “other” by those in power, while Mumby and Putnam (1992) describe how rituals and ceremonies are often used to control members of an organization. Woman #4 described the pervasive nature of military and sports terminology and imagery that she has observed. She said:

I think the whole makeup of the legislature and the way it’s set up and the way it operates is a bit of a disadvantage for women. I really do. I think it’s the men who shine in there because it’s like

an arena...you know...there's a lot of military terms used. There's a lot of sport terms used. You know, I mean the whole idea of campaigns...it's like military campaigns, I feel. You know, the strategy is kind of like that, looking for their weaknesses and finding those chinks in the armor, and these kind of hockey allusions...illustrations that you get all the time about 'drag the puck on this' and 'blood on the floor'. I hate that one.

The sheer numbers of men often lead to more aggressive tones in conversation, says Woman #7, and she has observed a lot of use of military and sports-oriented language. She also added that the Legislature frequently acknowledges achievements in these circles through resolutions and special guests being acknowledged in the House of Assembly. She says it has an alienating effect on female MLAs, as well as women watching the proceedings, explaining that:

I don't play hockey, I don't play sports, sports is a very predominant theme in our legislature. Sports and militarism – both of those things...are very, very strong. We have people in regularly in the gallery for their service in the military, well, women are not really part of that too much.

The notion of competition often found in sports, for example, extends to the process of getting on the list of questions for Question Period. Each week, both opposition parties participate in three Question Period sessions. Two are 60 minutes long, while the Wednesday session is 90 minutes long. The number of questions allocated to each opposition party depends on the number of seats they hold in the House. In my experience, our caucus, which had slightly more questions than the other opposition party at the time, could squeeze in about a dozen questions in an hour-long

session, and perhaps 15-18 questions on a longer Question Period day, if we kept the questions short. In the average week, then, a party might get about 40 questions. The leaders usually get the first two or three questions each day, leaving the remaining 30 questions to be divided up among all of the remaining caucus members. This meant that members often competed to get on the Question Period order in the first place, and then to get a more prominent position within the order of questions. The women interviewed discussed the competition to get questions. Some said they were not really prepared to engage in that kind of battle, letting the more assertive members get the positions in the order. Woman #4 says she had no interest in fighting to get a question, so she often just allowed her questions to be moved, refusing to fight to keep a more prominent spot in the order. She explained that actually, if her question got bumped, she was just as happy to be off the hook that day. If the question was important, she said, there were other ways to raise the issue through news releases, the website, or talking to the media. Woman #5 says sometimes the victory was getting an issue on the Question Period line-up at all, given the jockeying for position that took place each day. She explained that many of the more complex issues or broader issues – such as social challenges – don't necessarily lend themselves well to Question Period. She was explaining that some issues, such as poverty, for example, are complicated, and don't always fit within the short time frame of a question. Questions consist of a main question and two shorter supplementary questions. The entire exchange takes about two or three minutes, on average. So, Member #5 says the victory would sometimes be just getting these challenging issues on the agenda at all. She added that some of the important social issues fall off of parties' radar sometimes, and any profile that can be given to the issues in Question Period has value.

Question Period is not only a negative experience for female MLAs. The women interviewed also had positive things to say about aspects of Question Period. Woman #1 said that sometimes overcoming the atmosphere and bringing a point forward is a wonderful feeling.

“Question Period is kind of empowering too, because you really get...if your subject is important to you..it’s a little more fun to get your slant to it. A little more forceful.” She added that Question Period could be more effective, with a few changes to the processes that might remove some of the aggression and grandstanding, in favour of more effective debate.

Woman #5 said that despite how uncomfortable and challenging Question Period can be, she still felt fortunate to have a voice and opportunity that many people do not have. She said she is fortunate to be able to bring important issues to the floor of the Legislature, saying: “I think you’re pleased to have the opportunity to keep these issues in front of government and in front of the media and the public.” Woman #5 added that she believes it’s time to reform how some of the functions of the Legislature work by developing some new structures and new ways of MLAs working together for the common good. Woman #6 said that while she realizes that issues don’t usually get resolved during Question Period, it’s a stepping stone to seek action in other ways. She said she could often get better results by working behind the scenes, discussing the issue with department staff, or by taking the Minister aside when the environment wasn’t as heated. To Woman #6, the combative atmosphere of Question Period was probably the least effective way to get a question answered.

Some women said they really enjoyed Question Period. Woman #2 also said that she didn’t really mind Question Period most of the time, because the topics discussed were so interesting. She said she found the atmosphere in the House fairly friendly for the most part, and that while things often got aggressive, she didn’t take it personally. She said that each person

there has a different outlook, different experience base and a different personality, which was part of the wonder of the Legislature, and Question Period for her. She said: “52 personalities in there is wonderful. I mean, I wouldn’t want to be in a place where everybody was the same. Sometimes it was very boring in there!” Woman #7 also said that she enjoyed Question Period, and she believes it holds an important place in the democratic and legislative processes in Nova Scotia. She says that while it’s not place for the faint of heart, MLAs must find a way to function in Question Period. She said:

If you’re asking questions that connect with various interest groups, then you are taking up their issue as if you are their voice. They don’t have a voice, they don’t get to sit on the floor of the House and ask those questions.

She added that if you can’t find a way to ask those questions and give a voice to people who don’t have the opportunity to speak in the Legislature, you can’t be an effective MLA.

Many of the women spoke of experiencing good support and encouragement from their caucus colleagues, especially during and after Question Period. Woman #2 felt that the members of her team were there for her during and outside of Question Period, adding that many seasoned MLAs were called upon to take the newly elected members under their wing. She said she felt supported and appreciated within her caucus, noting that:

Certainly, I don’t know if the other caucuses operated that way, but I always felt that our caucus was really tight and we all really liked each other and enjoyed being in each other’s company. Everybody was really helpful. You could go to anybody and ask any question.

Woman #3 also felt the encouragement of her colleagues, saying that the members are very supportive and encouraging of one another, male and female alike, in her caucus. She said: “You know, I always feel supported in my caucus when I’m asking questions, so that’s very helpful.” She felt that they were working as a team and the feminine communication theorists such as Rakow and Wackwitz (2004) and Campbell (1971) would validate that this sense of collaborative effort would appeal to women. Despite some challenges with the language and analogies used during meetings, Woman #4 had similar comments about caucus support, saying that she felt that they were there to help, and that encouragement is important: “We all respond well if we’re encouraged and our colleagues are saying ‘good for you’”. Woman #6 said her colleagues were quite protective of her when Question Period got particularly rough from time to time and she was feeling upset about the experience. She explained that:

Some of my colleagues around me were ‘Don’t let it bother you, just stay focused, stay with the question, don’t feed into it, don’t buy into it, don’t throw anything back, just stay focused’...and then there would be some mentoring afterwards, certainly from wiser members around the table. So yeah, I was always encouraged about the members around me really making sure that I was going to be okay after the question, even though I may have been heckled a great deal or felt disrespected in some way.

As demonstrated by the women’s experiences articulated above, Question Period brings about a complex response from female MLAs. While the women interviewed universally agreed that Question Period is argumentative, aggressive and adversarial in nature, they all expressed that they feel an expectation that they must perform well, regardless of the challenges. The

women all indicated that Question Period is just something that MLAs have to do, and while it may be distasteful, there was a sense that everyone's in it together, muddling through the best way they can. Perhaps this seeming acceptance of the status quo reflects their collective experiences as a marginalized group, working within deeply structured gender bias, as Deetz (2001) explains. Perhaps the double binds against women theorized by Jamieson (1995) – that “no-win” situation placed on women who enter male-dominated spheres – leaves female MLAs feeling frustrated and unwilling to expend their limited time and energy on fighting against the male hegemony of the Legislature. I believe so. I also agree with Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles (1996) when they say that feminine rhetorical style contributes to the marginalization of women in politics because they are working in an environment which depends on masculine myths, icons and character traits, brought about by male-based institutions. This notion also helps us understand why most of the women interviewed felt self-conscious about how they performed in Question Period, especially when they watched video clips of themselves asking or answering questions. I believe that this level of discomfort and high self-criticism stems from many of the women trying to function in the atmosphere of Question Period when their natural communication style works in direct conflict to the practices and expectations surrounding this part of Legislative procedure.

Regarding heckling, all of the women acknowledged that heckling can be incredibly disruptive, and it can make it challenging – if not impossible – to communicate effectively and be heard by fellow members. As I mentioned above, because the research by scholars such as Bird (2005), Allen and Dean (2008) and Lovenduski and Norris (2003), we know that female MLAs are far more likely to raise issues affecting women in Nova Scotia. If their ability to be heard is diminished, I believe that it is a blow against all women. Heckling can pose problems in



being heard, especially for women with softer or higher voices, which is validated by Jamieson (1995), some of the women seemed hesitant to call for reforms regarding its use in the Nova Scotia Legislature. Even with attempts federally to reduce heckling during Question Period, the majority of women felt that it's here to stay. Despite their challenges with the communication style used during Question Period, all of the women interviewed said that Question Period is at least supposed to an important role within democracy and the Nova Scotia Legislature itself. The MLAs did agree that Question Period could be far more effective, and accomplish much more, if some reforms were implemented to reduce the fractious electioneering and partisan nature of Question Period and introduce a more cooperative approach. However, most of the women agreed that they couldn't imagine the time when these deeply-housed traditions would ever change substantially. As mentioned above, this lack of hope in seeing reform may well be a reflection of their marginalization within the structures of the Legislature. This sense of being on the outside looking in was also mirrored in the comments the women made about the language in the Legislature and during caucus meetings – particularly around Question Period – that revolved around sports and military imagery. They felt alienated by this symbolism when it was used in caucus and in the House by male members.

Finally, it is important to note that the women did not express only negative images of Question Period. It makes sense that not every single woman naturally uses feminine rhetorical style, nor would every woman be equally uncomfortable with aggressive and heated debate. Three of the women said that they actually enjoyed Question Period, even with the theatre and the often partisan and acidic debate. These women liked the thrust-and-parry atmosphere. Other women, while perhaps uncomfortable with the atmosphere of Question Period, still felt that the topics raised very interesting, while one MLA said she really enjoyed watching the different

personalities coming to the fore during this most dramatic part of the Legislature's processes. Half of the women said they also felt well-supported by their caucus mates, especially when debate got personal or out-of-hand.

### **Society's expectations**

It's a fair question to ask what I mean by such a broad category as "society's expectations". As I organized the basic themes expressed by the eight women into groups, it became apparent that there was a deeply collective theme surrounding how the women's perceptions of society's norms and values had an impact on their roles as female MLAs. While the basic themes were quite diverse, they all shared the organizing idea of society imposing its preconceived notions onto the women. Words such as expectations, roles, feminine and public scrutiny were used to describe how the women expressed their life in the political sphere. Voice, being heard and respect were used to describe their challenges within the Legislature as an organization. Gender, family and balance were also strongly connected among the women, as they expressed how society seems to feel they should function as women and as MLAs. As the diversity of words and the women's experiences will demonstrate, society's expectations can take many forms. As Jamieson (1995) argues, there are broader societal expectations and tricky traps for women who take on male-dominated roles, such as being a politician. There are also societal expectations regarding the work done by Members of the Legislature. These expectations can have a negative impact on MLAs' family life, but many of the women interviewed would argue that women feel it more, because in our society, women still carry out the majority of child and elder care, and housework. This is not the situation in every household, however, many of the women felt that the long hours of an MLA or even Cabinet Minister made

carrying out responsibilities at home nearly impossible without family or other supports. Many of the women I interviewed mentioned that they had to give careful consideration to the potential effects on their family that running for office would have. In some cases, they had considered running for office earlier, but decided against it due to family situations at the time. The women also commented on the media coverage of election campaigns and politics, saying that reporters often go to the “family” issue, when women themselves don’t identify it as a key element during interviews. Woman #3 said she was surprised to do an interview about women and politics with one media outlet, only to find that the only clip the reporter used was a brief quote where she said she had to think about her family before deciding to run. She said she was a little disappointed in that coverage, saying: “I had all kinds of great stats and all this kind of thing...and what clip do they include?” She felt the impact of media manipulation and framing of issues, as described by Parry-Giles (2000) regarding the media’s treatment of Hilary Clinton. The choice of clips, of images and of story placement all affect how the issue is framed and viewed by the public.

Another key challenge expressed by almost all of the women was finding a work-life balance as an MLA. They all mentioned that the House of Assembly sits irregularly and often with long hours, which is not conducive to a healthy personal or family life. Many of the women referenced how society seems to expect Members of the Legislature, as public servants, to be at constituents’ beck and call all of the time. The expectation extends to the public impression that longer Legislature sessions mean the MLAs are working up to expectations. The Legislature may not sit for many weeks at a time, but there are times when debate enters extended hours, which can begin in the morning and extend to very late at night with no breaks for meals. In 2001 the opposition began filibustering (dragging out debate) on Bill 68, a back-to-work bill affecting

health care workers. The government of the day extended House hours to 24 hours a day. During that occasion, and on top of the regular rigorous schedule that the MLAs face when the House is sitting, utter exhaustion and the inability to take care of personal needs were added into the mix. Even with normal House of Assembly hours, most of the women referred to the difficulty in getting constituency and critic or ministerial work done when the Legislature is sitting. Usually this work is done early in the day and late in the evening, outside of House hours. Some work gets done at the Legislature, when MLAs can grab a few minutes of time. It can make for grueling days, away from family and their constituency. Some women referred to the difficulty in just taking care of their everyday needs like laundry or cooking their own meals. Some rely on partners or family members to help, while others said they just do the best they can, and eat out perhaps a little too often. Others found they had to draw boundaries with constituents early on. Woman #1 said she refused to answer her phone after a certain time of night. Another MLA kept an unpublished number so that all of her constituency calls went to a designated line, because she feared her children picking up the phone and having to deal with an angry or abusive caller.

Many women expressed hope that the Legislature would someday reform its practices to sit for longer and planned periods of time, and with shorter days. A change to more predictable hours, most felt, would encourage more women to run, and it would also encourage more men with younger families to seek office as well. As Woman #7 pointed out: “Nothing in my life prepared me for the hours, the demands on my time or the public scrutiny of being an MLA”. Woman #1 said she learned quickly that she has to draw a line between her private life and public life:

You really have to define your MLA role and your personal role, your personal life. You really have to define them and say there's room for both. Because it's so easy to not...two things: One is to not have a personal life that doesn't involve politics and to be able to disconnect the ugly side of media and public scrutiny from your personal life and not have it hurt you. It's very hard. It's very, very hard.

Woman #3 said that even with having a very supportive caucus when it comes to family demands, there are often difficult choices to be made when home and long hours at the Legislature are both calling. She missed one family member's milestone event because of a scheduling conflict. "I thought...well, here we go!" She says that for the most part, she has been able to make most important family events, but it is not always easy. Woman #4 says it's very difficult to plan ahead, because there are no set times when the Legislature is sitting or not sitting. "Talk about planning your life. If I want to go anywhere in September, I don't know if I should go or not. When an opportunity to travel for a special occasion arose when the Legislature could be called, she said:

I decided that I was just going, because I so often said 'Oh I can't plan, I can't book'...I just thought 'You know what? If it (the Legislature) gets called, its gets called.' As it turns out, I didn't miss it.

Society's lingering reality still seems to be that women do the bulk of child and elder care, domestic duties, and the desire to take a break from these responsibilities flies in the face of women's selfless nature. We are expected to quietly allow ourselves to be martyrs, putting

others' needs ahead of ourselves. As Jamieson (1995) points out, when women leave this socially-imposed private and nurturing sphere, society imposes harsh expectations on them. The Legislature in Nova Scotia has not adapted to the reality of families with two working parents, and the "sandwich" generation who are balancing child and elder care (Abaya, 2011). The women indicated that changes are needed to make the Legislature work better for members with family responsibilities. Woman #4 said that this is nothing new in Canada. She explained that other Legislatures have changed the hours to be more family-friendly, which is something she'd like to see. She said that longer sessions, but shorter weeks would be helpful, so that MLAs could get home for longer stretches to tend to their families and their constituency work. Set daily hours would also help, she said. She cited Quebec as an example, where the National Assembly doesn't sit on Fridays, and they don't sit past 6:00 p.m. Woman #7 says that creating a more family-friendly Legislature is an essential part of addressing the male-dominated structures in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. She describes what a family-friendly Legislature could look like, saying:

What would a family-friendly Legislature look like? A family-friendly Legislature would have set sessions. So you could actually plan for your family. You know that your hours are 10:00 in the morning to 2:00 in the afternoon, and you'd be able to build the rest of your time around that and go home to your family. That, to me, would be the way to change our politics and bring more women in.

Woman #8 says she often thought about how unfriendly the Legislature is to members with families. She said that being a cabinet minister meant excessively long hours, and she couldn't

imagine how someone with family caregiving responsibilities would ever survive. She said there were times that even basic necessities were a challenge, saying that:

...Especially when they're getting into these (extended) sittings and stuff like that. How would you look after kids in that situation? How would your husband or partner even stay with you in that situation, where you were never there, you were always tired, you had no time to shop, you weren't doing what you were supposed to do...you were lucky to do laundry...How do you do that as a Minister of the Crown? I think there's a reason there are so many split-ups and divorces and stuff like that.

She added that the men of today's generation seem to be much better at carrying their share of the work at home, but she still wonders, even with a supportive partner, how a cabinet minister could possibly function given the grueling hours that society in general, and their colleagues in particular, expects of them. Nova Scotia has not seen many female cabinet ministers – only 13 - in its 253-year history of Houses of Assembly (Parliament of Canada, 2011). If we are to ever break this cycle and have more female members and cabinet ministers, the conditions need to be in place to allow them to function successfully in all facets of life. As long as many women in society continue to bear more of the weight of work at home, the unfriendly House hours will affect them disproportionately compared to their male counterparts. However, as Woman #7 pointed out, more predictable hours that allow members to have more balance in their lives would benefit all MLAs, regardless of gender or family situation.

The women also raised the issue of society's double-standards for the behaviors of women and men. This perception expressed by the women is supported by Feminist

Communication Theorists such as Jamieson (1995), Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles (1996), Vasby-Anderson (1999), Bligh et al (2010), Falk (2009), and Shepard (2009); and feminist organizational theorists such as Mumby and Putnam (1992), Deetz (2001), Ashcraft & Mumby (2004) and Mumby & Ashcraft (2006). All of these scholars support the idea that women are expected to maintain femininity while navigating masculine-dominated spheres. Women who cross the line into masculine behavior face different forms of censure, ranging from derogatory name-calling, unfavorable media coverage, and alienation from their colleagues. Most of the women felt this double-standard for their behavior in one form or another. Women said that they felt that aggressive behavior or even displaying confidence is treated differently in men and women by colleagues and society. As Woman #7 explained, women can be just as aggressive and forthright as men, however:

You can never be one of the boys. You've got to walk that line. You've got to continue to...you have to...because you are a gendered individual. You have to continue to be caring. You have to continue to be empathetic. You have to continue to be all of those things that are associated with women. And the second you lose any of that stuff, you're dead in the water. Totally dead in the water. So there's a double-standard, and I'm very aware of that. And I don't necessarily like it, because it places a huge burden on women.

Carlin and Winfrey (2009) explored this double standard in their analysis of media coverage and public perception of Hilary Clinton and Sarah Palin. Their findings support that there is a fine line for women in politics: you can be aggressive, but you must maintain that veneer of



femininity. According to Campbell (1995), female politicians who are seen as too masculine lose their audience. The views expressed by the women interviewed seem to indicate that it's not just your audience: you risk losing the support of your peers and your political supporters. The line is equally precarious on the other side, however, if women are too feminine. Woman #4 said that if you're too feminine, "they say that you can't handle finance, you can't handle business, you won't be tough enough to handle the hard decisions". Shawn Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles (1995) validate this with their research, which states that women who are too feminine are considered weak and incompetent. Other women felt the same judgment if they were too feminine, indicating that society seems to believe that women can't be competent in or knowledgeable about, issues traditionally dominated by men such as the economy, justice, transportation or finance. Woman #5 added that:

In political life, as in many other professions...because [women's voices are] sometimes softer and more conciliatory...that they're under-valued and not heard to the same extent, or considered to the same extent, as male voices, especially on issues where men have perhaps traditionally been viewed as the experts. Issues...such as the economy and jobs...issues that are seen to be higher priority. And this comes out in many different forms, many different places, and I think that no one particular circumstance stands out, but it just leads women, perhaps, to lose confidence. And perhaps they don't speak up as often as they should.

These comments speak to the institutional sexism of politics and government in Nova Scotia. Issues about the economy, justice and finance are traditionally male-dominated realms of

influence. Aside from health care, which generally gets high priority, the “nurturing” issues get less profile in Question Period, or in political campaigns for that matter. Issues of housing, poverty, women’s equality are not normally on the top agenda in campaigns, or in the House of Assembly. Female MLAs, while likely inclined to raise some of these issues, don’t have the same access to power within their caucus or in the House to push these items forward on the public agenda. What about electing women leaders who will create a better balance of power in their caucus? Little chance, according to Woman #4, who said that there seem to be too many obstacles in place for women to become political leaders in Nova Scotia. She commented that there have been few female premiers in Canada, past or present that serve as examples to draw upon in moving towards female leadership of political parties. Historically, she added, parties often seem to choose female leaders when things are not looking good, and those women are often eliminated during the next election campaign. She expressed some frustration at the lack of female political leaders:

It would be nice to see the Legislature get to the point where they could imagine women leaders. Because they can’t imagine it, and if they can’t imagine it, the public can’t imagine it. And it’s something that I think is pretty discouraging.

The Nova Scotia experience with this is particularly challenging to evaluate. There have only been two female provincial party leaders (Alexa McDonough and Helen MacDonald – NDP) and one interim female party leader in the Legislature (Karen Casey, PC) (Parliament of Canada, 2011). Woman #4 added that many female party leaders in history have come to office through a leadership race while the party holds government, not through elections, and they are often defeated when they run their first election.

Whether it's society's expectations of working almost superhuman hours, or cultural values that eschew women who take on an aggressive or confident tone, women in the Legislature face challenges because they have chosen to enter the male-dominated public sphere of political life. This can create unfair pressures and unrealistic demands on their time, while society still expects them to take care of hearth and home. These double-standards make life as a female MLA one of constantly working hard to meet the often unreasonable expectations placed on them.

### **Women's equality in the political sphere**

In recent elections, women in Nova Scotia's Legislature have made gains. They now comprise nearly 25 per cent of the total number of members – a record number (Parliament of Canada, 2011). I wanted to ask former and current female MLAs what they thought about women's equality in politics in Nova Scotia. I asked if they had ever felt treated differently, or at a disadvantage, as a female politician. The subject also came up organically, and in varied ways, during our interviews. Some of the basic themes expressed centered the numbers of women elected, with codes emerging such as women, MLAs, parties, elections, quotas, campaigns, equal, and critical mass. Another thread of themes focused on why women run – and should run – for office, and basic themes included motivation, helping others, community, and advocacy.

One of the key themes that emerged from the interviews was that of women's motivation for seeking provincial political office. The question was initially asked as an introductory question, intended to break the ice. However, it quickly became apparent that there were some very interesting commonalities among all of the women interviewed. Due to the very personal nature of the women's particular stories in why they sought office, I could not offer many details

or use most of their comments in this section, for fear it would easily identify them. That said, many of the women who ran for provincial office were motivated by wanting to help those who can't advocate for themselves such as seniors, single mothers, people with disabilities and people living in poverty. Some MLAs began their advocacy at other levels, whether it was in the community, at home and school associations, on school boards, or in municipal politics. Many expressed that this level of activity encouraged them to seek a higher level of political office, so they could accomplish even more for those in need, and their communities. This aligns with the research of Blankenship and Robson (1995), who included conceptualizing power of public office as the capacity to empower others and get things done, and moving women's issues to the forefront as two key characteristics of feminine rhetorical style. It is also noteworthy that in most cases, the women ran for office because someone they respected asked and encouraged them to run, be it a respected party leader, community members or party members. This seems to validate Lawless and Fox's (2004) assertion that women often need to be asked before they'll run for political office. One standout reason for running, expressed by Woman #7, was that she ran because she was tired of dealing with the "old white guys" in office at the time, and felt that she could do a better job than they could.

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was that politics is a male-dominated sphere. Some of the women referred to politics as an "old boys club", and most agreed that things are not likely to change until more women are elected to the Legislature. Woman #5 said she doubted any real change would happen until at least 30 per cent of the members were female. Most women indicated that gender issues were seldom discussed with their colleagues unless the male members were not present. When asked why she felt that was the case, why gender issues were not raised by female MLAs, Woman #5 replied: "I find in most circumstances when men

complain, it's taken at face value. When women complain, it's seen as whining. And there's that extra level of negativity and discounting it because of that."

It was interesting to hear the women's views on the value of meeting with other female MLAs. Many of the women found it helpful to discuss their issues and observations with their fellow women members. However, not everyone felt this way. Woman #1 felt that "women only" meetings were not helpful and they were actually counter-productive. She expressed a feeling that:

...When we have these women's caucus meetings that say 'boys you all have to leave the room'. That's when I feel the most different and I'm not sure anybody else feels it – I think a couple do. I find that we're drawing that line and moving us away from being part of everything by defining us and saying 'we're women and we need to talk privately' ....Because it's usually about stuff that there's no reason why we couldn't have had this as a conversation with our male colleagues. If we were having conversations around some of the issues that they may have been facing...that's a good reason to be able to open up and be open.

Woman #1 may have a point. By choosing not to expose their male colleagues to issues around the gendered nature of the Legislature, and the challenges it poses for female members, are women perpetuating the continuation of these structures? Unless male colleagues are made aware of the issues that their female counterparts are facing, how can they become part of the solution? It is interesting that most of the women interviewed felt that they could not share their

thoughts with their male colleagues, for fear of ridicule or loss of respect. Making a gender-inclusive environment that welcomes such discussion is a challenge for all political parties.

An example of an issue that may seem small to the casual observer, but that has a deeper meaning, is that of washroom access. Only within the past decade was a women's washroom installed on the same floor where members sit in the Legislature. It is a single washroom, versus the men's facilities that can accommodate four people at a time. In times of debate when a quick turnaround time may be essential, this becomes an issue of equality for the female members. If the single female powder room is occupied, the women have the option of going downstairs to the public washrooms. Or, as Woman #3 describes, they can partner up and commandeer the men's washroom. She describes taking turns standing guard for fellow female members while they used the men's facilities. She realizes that there are fewer female members than male MLAs however she wonders why the women don't have equal numbers of facilities.

The women interviewed expressed feelings of being treated with less respect than male colleagues. Woman #6 said she has sensed what feels like "snickering behind their hands" and underestimating her ability and intelligence from colleagues. This bothers her, because she is a capable person, and feels she is being underestimated. She describes that:

Certainly, well obviously with some of the men on government side. You could sense that. It was sort of like, well you know she doesn't know as much as we would know. And it wasn't because we've been here in this position for a long time and so therefore we would know, it's because well, we're men and so we know better... You have to be strong-willed and confident to really go toe-to-toe to those individuals that perhaps don't respect you as

much as your colleagues may respect you. Perhaps they don't think that you know as much or are as capable of understanding the issues as some that may have been around the political block for a long time. You know, sometimes we hear in this world, and probably not only in this world, well 'they're probably not the sharpest tack', you know or 'they're not the sharpest knife in the drawer'. Well you can't let these sort of things really get to you.

Not letting it get to you is one thing, but certainly being deemed less intelligent or less capable by colleagues in the Legislature can have an impact on a female MLA's ability to carry out her work effectively. As a long-time observer of the Legislature, I have witnessed moments when women are spoken to in insultingly condescending ways by other members. By speaking about female MLAs in the way Woman #6 describes, male members are making light of the skills and abilities that got the women elected in the first place. This kind of behaviour devalues the women and questions their right to be in the public sphere of the Legislature. It further serves to alienate the women on the receiving end.

The alienation of female MLAs is not only at the hands of individuals. In fact, it's often more of an institutional form of discrimination. Woman #7 said that the structures of government and politics marginalize women, and it is an old and familiar battle:

Women have been mothers, women have had responsibility for children, women have... women were refused the vote. Historically if you look at it, women weren't persons under the law. So our involvement as women in politics has really been held back for many, many, many, many years... You've got the vote, got women

in the game, but that only went so far and that was very much based on an argument that women should have the vote because, in fact, they were women, because they were mothers. So the 60s, I think brought women in more from a perspective of equality – we have more of a right to an equal voice and all of that kind of stuff. But we haven't changed the structures.

Woman #7 added that she is hopeful that perhaps the structures will change when more women are elected to the Nova Scotia Legislature. As we have seen from the critical organization theorists, structure can lie very deep within organizations. As Morgan (2006) and Deetz (2001) point out, deeply held structures in organizations are also a product of society and society's expectations. Until our society changes enough to force the issue, will the structures change? Woman #7 wonders if they will. She said the Legislature might change, but will the “cut-and-thrust” of debate change? For the time being, however, women must play by the existing rules, within the existing structures, because there is no other alternative. She explained that: “Right now, women basically have no choice, if they're to succeed.” While most women share Woman #7's belief that change may come, given time and more women in the Legislature, they also expressed that there is still a long road ahead for women in provincial politics before they see a level playing field. As woman #4 expressed:

I think in some respects, the women who are in the Legislature today still feel very much that they're pioneers, that there's still a long road to travel. I look forward to the day when it is assumed and expected that women will be at least half, if not more, of every part of government. That the way government operates reflects a



better balance between work and family and personal health. When it is taken for granted that every aspect of government will be a respectful workplace. That every point of view is necessary and adds something to a better result and a better decision .

The women interviewed also indicated that they found their biggest critics have often come from within their party, and often from unexpected sources. The alienation felt by the institution of the Legislature, and some male colleagues, is also created by people the MLAs would expect to be allies. Woman #7 described feeling shock at the responses of some of her party's members, whom she would have expected to support her. She said that:

Members of your own party can be the hardest on you. That surprises me. I mean I would...I would have thought that the people who would be the hardest on you would be your partisan political 'enemies', if you want to use harsh language. But in fact the people who are the hardest on you are the people who you actually look to for support, and that's a big shock...and that continues to be a shock to me.

Where can women in the Legislature turn, then, for support? It seems that there are few safe havens, and that life as a female Member of the Legislative Assembly can be a very lonely and isolating existence. As Woman #7 further explained, in her experience:

Women I know, women who are feminists, women who I would consider friends, or had been my friends...who over time, the longer I'm in politics, the more critical they become. Because they're not...because they have adopted this idea that you've

become one of the boys. Once you're a successful female politician, it's...the more success you have, I find, the more likely people – some people – are to see you as kind of having sold out.

So, for some women, the very people they expected would be in their corner, are their harshest critics. In my experience, a lot of this phenomenon lies in expectations of women and advocates of those women who seek political office. We vote for women, hoping that they will help bring about the societal changes we are seeking as feminists and activists. Then, when the women are elected to office, whether in opposition or government, they are bound by the political structures and party politics that have always been in place. When they are not able to make the changes or raise the issues as vocally as expected by their supporters, these allies turn on the female MLAs and become harsh critics.

The alienation within political parties takes place in other ways, including in how communication takes place within the party ranks. Woman #1 explains that sometimes communications within the caucus seems to be shared with “the old boys’ guys” before it comes to other members. “And that’s annoying and I don’t know if it’s meant to...I don’t think it’s meant to exclude us. I just think that they’ve been doing it for so long, and don’t realize that they’re really excluding us. That annoys me.” Internal communications within a caucus can be critical, especially when the Legislature is sitting. Many organizations struggle with internal communications, however, many of the female MLAs interviewed felt that they were sometimes on the outside looking in, within their own party.

Even running for office can involve feeling somewhat marginalized as a female candidate. Parties may not acknowledge that there are practical gender considerations for women running campaigns. Woman #2 said that women can’t canvass their constituency as quickly as

many men, because it's not safe to go out alone. This may require more financial and volunteer resources in order to effectively canvass potential voters. She explains:

Even going door-to-door. Think about it. A man in a campaign can go door-to-door by himself. He's not going to be worried or feel threatened. But...I don't go door-to-door by myself. At the very least there's got to be somebody on the street with me, like across the street or whatever...So they can cover more territory with less resources, so that gives them the upper hand in a campaign.

The women interviewed also felt that female incumbents, even respected MPs and MLAs, can be at a disadvantage during campaigns. Woman #3 said that the federal Liberals lost a lot of good women during the 2011 federal election, and she felt it was because other parties deliberately targeted women's seats. "I think in part because parties do target seats held by women because they are viewed as easier to knock off." Whether or not parties target female incumbents in a deliberate sexist way would be difficult to determine, however research by Barbara Palmer and Dennis Simon (2005) concludes that while female candidates win at the same rates as male candidates, they face more competition and their incumbency encourages more female competition to run against them (p. 39). There is much research that the incumbency advantage makes it difficult for women to succeed in campaigns because they often have to run against well-established incumbents, usually men, and it is difficult to win (Schwindt-Bayer, 2005).

The female MLAs interviewed all saw the need for change within the Legislature and political parties if women are ever to achieve equal representation and equal voice in Nova Scotia politics. Many hope that by getting more women elected into the House of Assembly, by achieving so-called "critical mass", these changes will eventually come, but the road ahead is

long and arduous. Whether it's fighting to be heard at the caucus table, or fighting for equal access to washroom facilities in the House of Assembly, female MLAs fight many battles on many fronts in the name of making a place for women in Nova Scotia politics.

The interviews with the women provided many shared perspectives of female MLAs about the world they enter when they are elected to the House of Assembly. Their experiences tell a tale of an institution that has seen many advances by women, especially in the last 25 years. However, the institution and its practices are still male-dominated, and women often feel marginalized and alienated by the processes and traditions in which they participate. Most of the women interviewed shared the view that the Legislature is actually a small part of the work done by MLAs, however its value is disproportionately high because of the opportunity to gain media and public attention when the House is sitting. Women feel ill-at-ease with Question period, for the most part, however, they all see it as a necessary function of democracy that they just have to deal with. They do feel that the Legislature affords them an opportunity to be a voice for those who are in need, and to raise important issues, but doing so is not easy given the challenging communications atmosphere in which they are expected to function and succeed. For the most part, the women interviewed felt supported and appreciated by their caucus colleagues, but there are times when they feel as though they are not part of the "inner circle" in their caucus, which is often dominated by men.

The Nova Scotia Legislature is an important and cherished part of our history and parliamentary democracy within Nova Scotia. However, the experiences expressed by the women interviewed make it clear that we have a long way to go before women feel welcome and that they are on a level playing field within its hallowed halls.

## Chapter Five: Conclusions

The experiences of women in the Nova Scotia Legislature echo many of the arguments put forward by the scholars mentioned earlier in this thesis. In some cases, they seem to either run contrary to some theories or, at the very least, the women's experiences give pause for thought when it comes to the validity of the theories.

The fact that progress towards equality is being made in Nova Scotia, albeit slowly, supports the findings of the research by Lovenduski and Norris (2003) on the election of female MPs in Britain. It also echoes Allen and Dean (2008), who described progress in Britain as improving the situation "from truly horrendous to fairly bad" (p. 214). Perhaps that would be a bit of a harsh assessment for the Nova Scotia context, however, given that the number of women in the Legislature has increased steadily in the last 12 years. That said, most of the women had stories to tell of feeling intimidated, bullied, afraid to talk about their experiences as women, and some even felt threatened. The experiences recounted by the women demonstrate that there are issues with the communications atmosphere of the Legislature that affect female MLAs in often profound ways. These effects range from being challenging to actually impeding the ability of the women to communicate effectively, raise issues that are important to them, and do their job as an MLA. The women's experiences also support Allen and Dean's argument that the rituals of Westminster are grounded in masculine notions of politics, and that those who use feminine styles of rhetoric are "marginalised and belittled" (p. 214). The Nova Scotia data also validates the findings of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2000), which said that politics is still mostly unwelcoming to women.

It was interesting that most of the women indicated that they ran for provincial office because someone they respected encouraged them to do so, or even asked them to run. This

supports the point by Lawless and Fox (2004) that women who run are likely to have been asked. The fact that many of the women interviewed – and many serving in the Legislature who were not interviewed - started out at the community level, serving first in local schools, organizations, and grass-roots government such as school boards and municipal councils.

Turning to feminist communication theory, the experiences discussed by the women interviewed support the assertion made by Blankenship and Robson (1995), in relation to the feminine style of women's political discourse, that women envision public office as an opportunity to “get things done” and to help others (p. 359). All of the women ran because they wanted to help those in need, speak for those who cannot speak for themselves to government, and make a difference in their community. Blankenship and Robson's (1995) attributes of feminine style in female politicians also included basing political judgments on concrete, lived experience, valuing inclusivity, approaching policy formation holistically and moving women's issues to the forefront. All of these notions came forward during the interview process with the eight current and former MLAs.

The findings of the data depart from the theory on the subject of feminine rhetorical style. Campbell (1971), Dow and Tonn (1993) and Meyer (2007), argue that forms feminine rhetorical style help empower women. Feminine rhetorical style may hold that power in some milieus but according to the Nova Scotian women's experiences, feminine rhetorical style is not useful or empowering in the context of the Question Period. The environment of Question Period is distinctly male, and there are very few opportunities to effectively employ feminine rhetorical style. Women are able to, and do, employ a more feminine rhetorical approach in other avenues of debate within the House of Assembly, as described by Campbell (1971). They use more collaborative and story-telling approaches in debate on bills, committee work, budget estimates

or other speeches within the Legislature. They also use Meyer's (2007) invitational rhetoric in less combative functions of the House. However, and without exception, the women all indicated that – as distasteful or unnatural as it may be – they must approach Question Period within the accepted rules of Westminster debate and find ways to cope with the combative atmosphere it presents. In this regard – by adopting a more masculine approach to debate – the women's experiences support the findings of Meyer (2007) who said that in the cases of power relationships, women will tend to adopt masculine styles of rhetoric. This notion of adopting masculine styles, including increased aggression, discussed by Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles (1996) is supported by the women's experiences, and validates their argument that this is made necessary by women functioning within male-based institutions. Many of the women also were aware of the double-standard for women held up by society, that they adopt a masculine rhetorical style at the risk of being labeled as too masculine, cold, callous, dominating, aggressive and, yes, a bitch. The feelings expressed by the women over this double bind validates the findings of Jamieson (1995) that double binds are traps used against women who enter male-dominated spheres, such as the political sphere, and it also supports the theories put forward by Parry-Giles (2000), Vasby-Anderson (1999), Trent, Schmisser and Gauder (2000), and Campbell (1995, 1998) that all speak of the risks women take in society if they appear to be too masculine or aggressive. These theories share the common link that women who are too masculine, who are not deemed feminine enough by society and their peers, risk being alienated and further marginalized by their public and their colleagues. Most of the women interviewed seemed keenly aware that they must maintain their femininity while participating in the male-dominated structures of the House of Assembly. Some felt they were probably portrayed by their peers, the media and the public as more hard-hearted and iron-willed than they are in reality.

These experiences also support the findings of those who researched the 2008 campaigns of Sarah Palin and Hillary Clinton: Carlin and Winfrey (2009), Harp, Loke & Bachmann (2010) and Oles (2010).

The women also were aware of the risks of being too feminine, including societal views that women who are too 'female' are incapable of political leadership, making tough decisions, or handling difficult portfolios or critic files such as finance, jobs, or justice. Raising their voices and showing emotion is likely to be perceived as being "shrill" and weak. This supports the theories of Manning (2006), who argues that adopting a feminine rhetorical style is not effective and that a more masculine approach, despite the unfortunate epithets it may draw, was the better choice, as least for Hillary Clinton. It also validates the assertion by Carlin and Winfrey (2009), who say that women must walk a fine line between too masculine and too feminine. It also supports the theories of Bligh, Merolla, Schroedel and Gonzalez (2010), Falk (2009), and Shepard (2009) who assert that the media will focus on the emotions of women more so than those of men, often to the detriment of the woman's political image.

The women's perspectives in Nova Scotia also seem to support Lovenduski and Norris's (2003) claim that women bring different values to the legislative environments where they serve. The women interviewed were very much aware that they carried a distinct worldview and set of values compared to many of their male colleagues. The challenge, sometimes, was having their voice heard. The difficulties in being heard brings together the inter-connectedness of gender, communication and social change put forward by Rackow and Wackwitz (1992). Spivak's (1988) views on how feminist communication theory can illuminate inequality and oppression certainly apply to the situation of the women in the Nova Scotia Legislature. Many of their experiences include feeling that they could not express themselves to caucus colleagues for fear



of ridicule or losing their respect. The environment of Question Period also makes it difficult for women to be heard, given that their voices carry less and some felt that they were targeted and heckled more because they were women.

Turning to critical and feminist organizational theory, the women's experiences in the Nova Scotia Legislature reflect the feminist perspective on how women tend to experience other organizations. The Legislature and its many masculine traits and traditions exemplifies Mumby and Ashcraft's (2006) assertion that communication does "ideological work, constructing original realities and identities in ways that privilege certain interests over others" (p. 78). The structures of the Nova Scotia Legislature – and indeed Westminster politics – are designed in such a way that it enshrines the perspectives of a historical male hegemony, making it difficult to challenge the status quo. This validates assertions by Mumby (1987) that narratives in organizations are used as a tool to control behavior and maintain power. As the women's experiences bear out, the only way to survive and succeed in the House of Assembly is to adapt to the masculine environment and adopt masculine ways of debating. There is not yet a critical mass of female Members of the Legislature that would allow for breakthroughs in political parties and in the structures of the Legislature to create a more gender-equal environment, so for the moment, the male members are more privileged than many of the women. The notion of adopting masculine traits also supports Nichols' (1993) assertion that women in organizations often feel that have to adopt male behavior. It is interesting that some of the women identified the prevalence of sports-related language, and Nichols' research indicated that women seeking leadership roles in the post-war workplace often adopted sports terminology in an attempt to fit in. The masculinization of women's behavior in the Legislature also supports Deetz' contention that marginalized groups often lose the ability to self-describe because their identities are

mediated by power within their organization. I believe this affects women in the Legislature because they are often prevented from self-describing as feminine, and they also lose the ability to self-describe as activists for women when their voices are held back by the hegemonic powers that be. The women interviewed alluded to issues with equitable washroom access, and feeling somewhat intimidated by their physical surroundings, replete with ornate dark woodwork and enormous pictures of “old dead white guys” (Personal communication, June 29, 2011). Indeed the long hours, irregular sittings and high workloads for Ministers are also functions of the physical environment of the Legislature, limiting the family-friendliness of the House of Assembly and making it less attractive to certain members of society, male and female.

The experiences of the female legislators interviewed also support the findings of Mumby and Putnam (1992), who asserted that organizational practices build different identities for men and women and marginalize the women (p. 466). Given the women’s experiences with Question Period and their challenges to perform up to expectations in that environment, they validate the assertion by Mumby and Putnam that women only participate in certain dimensions of organizational life (1992, p. 466). These experiences also support Ashcraft and Mumby’s (2004) assertion that gendered organizations are created, moment-by-moment as communication takes place. During and after watching clips of themselves in Question Period, most of the women expressed self-consciousness, disappointment with their performance and discomfort at watching themselves on the screen. This further supports Mumby and Putnam’s claims that organizations control employees emotions through rituals and ceremonies, until the “managed heart” changes their emotions in order to live up to the expectations of the organization (1992, pp. 471-473). When watching themselves, instead of questioning the environment of Question Period – the written questions that are not in their voice, the heckling, the difficulty being heard, the

animosity – the women questioned their own performance, many of them expressing that they could do better. Many of them discussed their feelings that Question Period wasn't useful, and little was accomplished, and yet almost all of the women interviewed felt that they just had to perform in it, and perform well, regardless of the structure itself. Could it be this gender-imbalanced structure is so normalized, few question it among themselves and their colleagues? Do the storied traditions and myths of the Nova Scotia Legislature, with its rich history, make it even more difficult to challenge its traditions and practices? Mumby and Putnam would answer an unequivocal 'yes'. I agree.

DuToit (2006) summarized organizations as being historically designed for men and dominated by male values (p. 57). The recollections of the women interviewed strongly support this perspective. Many of the women also expressed their need to tap into the male network, the "old boys' club" in order to gain the respect of their peers and to succeed within their party and the Legislature. DuToit's assertion that the male-dominated networks attain dominance over women in the organization seems to be validated by the experiences related by the women interviewed for this project. As mentioned before, many of the women felt that they could not raise gender-based issues with their colleagues because their complaints were not given the same value as those of their male counterparts and were often dismissed as whining. Some members were frustrated at the lack of gender-related discussions at the caucus table, feeling that more issues would be addressed if the female members raised them with male colleagues present. DuToit also argued that women often must take on masculine traits in order to succeed in organizations. The data coming from the women's interviews certainly supports her point.

What was somewhat surprising and very interesting is that many of the key theoretical points were borne out so strongly from the women's interviews. Many of the points in the

feminist communication and feminist organizational theoretical frameworks were repeated in interview after interview. They were expressed by many of the women, if not all of the women. It was interesting to see how clearly the experiences in the Nova Scotia Legislature contradict the beliefs that feminine rhetorical style is empowering to women. Perhaps this reflects the belief expressed by Woman #7, who said she doesn't believe that communication is gendered, but the structures of the Legislature definitely are.

The basic codes, when rendered down through organizing themes, provide us with four key global themes, which are the foundations of the conclusions that I draw from the research. I feel confident in these conclusions, because they are derived directly from the voices of the women themselves, and the issues that they chose to identify and express in the interviews.

The first conclusion is that female MLAs experience the Legislature in ways that they perceive to be different from men. Without interviewing the men, we cannot know conclusively whether – or how – perceptions of the Legislature differ between women and men. However, the interviews with these eight female legislators make it clear that they *themselves* believe they see the Legislature through different eyes than their male counterparts. They are often uncomfortable with their surroundings or with the practices within the Legislature – of which Question Period is a big example. The women expressed many ways in which they feel alienated or marginalized in the House of Assembly and in their roles as MLAs. Even more important, in my estimation, is that they don't feel encouraged to, or even capable of, sharing their values, vision and experiences with their male colleagues. When women do discuss their perspectives about the Legislature it is often done amongst themselves, and their male colleagues are not included in the conversation. In order for this to change, first of all, women in caucuses need to know that they are welcome to – and even encouraged to – openly discuss issues through a

gendered lens at the caucus table. They also need to be able to discuss gender issues with the Speaker and committees of the Legislature, if reform is ever to be sought and achieved.

Secondly, it is clear that the Nova Scotia Legislature is filled with masculine traditions, practices and structures, many of which can make it an uninviting place for women. The structures contain deeply-seeded power struggles that serve to marginalize women. Many of the women expressed feeling ill-at-ease in their surroundings, and uncomfortable with the practices of the Legislature. They felt that they had to adopt unnatural behaviors in order to cope with the atmosphere in the Legislature and perform according to perceived expectations. The Legislature presents an intimidating environment, which can affect women's ability to have their voices heard. If their voices are not heard, they cannot be effective advocates for the people whom they came into office to serve. Since helping others and serving their community is a strong motivator for most of the women running for office, this presents a source of frustration and stress for female MLAs. The importance of the legislature is treated disproportionately to the actual role it plays in most MLAs' lives because it is where politicians and parties get the most media attention. The constant vying for media attention and political points often ramps up the rhetoric and theatrics in the House of Assembly, creating a more combative environment that further alienates many women. The most important work that MLAs do, many women said, is at the community level and advocating for constituents with departments and Ministers outside of the Legislature environment.

My third conclusion is that Question Period is a male-dominated structure which many women MLAs find foreign, unnatural and distasteful, yet they must perform well in it in order to achieve the respect of their peers. The women's reaction to watching themselves in Question Period really demonstrates how hard they are on themselves, and how keenly they feel the need

to succeed in Question Period. They experience expectations of scoring points by either successfully slamming the government or quelling the opposition. While Question Period achieves little and most women saw it as more drama than substance, it is a highly competitive environment. Failure to perform means you are letting down your party and not succeeding as a Member of the Legislative Assembly. Furthermore, many women felt that failure in Question Period meant that they were failing to properly represent the needs and concerns of their constituents, who don't have a voice on the floor of the House. Many women felt uncomfortable in aggressively competing for prominence on the Question Period question order, which means that they are often relegated to lower positions in the order. Lower order questions are far less likely to gain media or public attention, and the MLA may not be able to draw focus on important issues if they are asked near the end of Question Period. This affects their public profile, as well as their standing within their parties. Heckling is a longstanding tradition in Westminster politics, but it is often used to shut down those speaking, making it impossible for them to effectively communicate. Uncontrolled heckling is difficult for women to combat, because their voices are higher and they tend to go shrill if the women engage in raising their voices or yelling. Many of the women engage in masculine behaviour in order to survive in this environment, but if they do so, they face judgment by their peers and the public for being too aggressive, uncaring, cold, and hard-hearted.

My fourth conclusion is that many women enter politics because they are driven by a desire to serve others, help those in need and advocate for those without a voice. From this experience, I believe that there is a pool of women in Nova Scotia who are talented, intelligent, experienced – in different ways, and who share a desire to serve their communities. This means there are many potential candidates in Nova Scotia who would have an interest in running for

political office, should the opportunity arise. That said, perhaps we need to explore the ideas put forward by Lawless and Fox (2004) that say women generally need to be encouraged and even asked to run. According to Lawless and Fox, this is because women are not socialized into believing that they have the inherent right or capacity to run. Someone may need to tell them that they have the ability and support to seek political office. While this idea is beyond the scope of this research, it is an area for possible future research into how we can encourage more women to run for political office in Nova Scotia.

My final conclusion is that attaining equality for women in the Legislature is a Catch-22 situation: more women are needed before changes are likely to be realized, but changes may be necessary before more women will want to serve in the Legislature. The women all agree that getting more women elected to the House of Assembly will lead to the numbers necessary to being the process of changing the structures and practices of the Legislature. Many of the women felt that the current atmosphere in the Legislature is beyond their ability to change effectively. Even though they view many aspects of the Legislature as dysfunctional, intimidating and affecting their ability to communicate effectively, women don't speak out as often as they'd like and they are very selective about choosing their battles within their caucuses. As many women expressed, female MLAs are left with little choice but to play the man's game for the time being, until reforms can be won in the future. They must adapt to the current structures and traditions, and use ways of communicating that may not be comfortable, if they are to perform to perceived expectations. Many feel that they must work harder and demonstrate that they know more than their male counterparts in order to gain respect within their parties and among their colleagues in the House of Assembly. They see gains for women, but recognize that in many respects they are

still pioneers. Until more women are elected, female members will still have to find ways to succeed in an unwelcoming and challenging environment.

These circumstances, combined, act as a barrier to achieving equal representation by women in the Nova Scotia legislature, but these factors exist in other provincial legislatures and Canada's Parliament. As mentioned at the beginning of this work, it was outside of my research scope to definitively prove the link between the environment in the Nova Scotia Legislature and the lack of women seeking political office at that level. Having said that, I do believe that the experiences of female MLAs I interviewed leave us with a clear picture that the Nova Scotia Legislature is challenging at best, and unwelcoming and even hostile at worst, to female legislators. Furthermore, this research didn't explore issues of the lack of equality in cultural and race representation in the House of Assembly. What we do know is that there are members of the legislature who feel marginalized and who struggle to function and be heard in the House. I hope that future research will delve into these issues further, and propose solutions that may help our legislators seek to level the playing field and create a more inclusive environment in our House of Assembly.

Finally, I recognize that this work aims much criticism at the imbedded structures and practices within the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. The women's experiences, and my own observations, lead me to believe that there is much room for improvement in how these structures operate. I do want to state clearly that I have fundamental respect for the historic institution of the Legislature in Nova Scotia, and for each and every member, past and present, who has chosen to serve. They have, and continue to, inspire me. I would like to close with the words of Woman #5, who really summed up how fortunate we are to have the Nova Scotia House of Assembly, as human and flawed as it may be. May we all live up to her challenge:



And I think that trying to promote people's confidence in the Legislative procedures, not the Legislature itself, in terms of parliamentary democracy. We are so fortunate, you know, when I think of what's on the news about people lined up, traveled for days and lined up in long line-ups to go vote for the first time in countries where they've not had that ability. And it just makes me so grateful that it's very easy to be part of a democracy here in Canada and yet we not only take it for granted, we just...we often ignore it and don't actually get engaged in the processes. So...it's frustrating that people don't understand how valuable it is to be a democratic society. So I think that we have a role in trying to turn that around.

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## Appendix A: Proposed Interview Questions

1. Why did you run for office? What were your motivations?
2. Describe, if you can recall, how you felt when you first stepped onto the floor of the legislature? Participated in your first Question Period?
3. To the best of your recollection, what was your biggest surprise as a newly elected MLA?

(Watch videos of Question Period)

4. What, if you can recall, were you thinking as this exchange took place?
5. Did you discuss it at all with your colleagues? What did you say about it?
6. How does it make you feel, seeing the video now?
7. Are there any specific things you remember doing to cope with the communications atmosphere in the legislature?
8. Are there any particular moments you can recall that made you feel that you were being treated differently as a woman?

(Share research about feminine rhetorical style: women communicate differently, collaboratively, not usually comfortable with Westminster debate/argumentative style of debate)

9. How do you feel hearing that? What has your experience as a female MLA been like?

Closing questions:

10. If I was a woman thinking about running for office, what would you say to me about the communication environment I'm about to enter?
11. Did I miss anything? Is there anything you want to add about your experience as a female MLA?

Appendix B



INTERVIEW AND RECORDING CONSENT FORM

Mount Saint Vincent University  
Graduate Public Relations

Lori Errington



Dr. DeNel Rehberg Sedo  
902-457-6478  
[denel.rehbergsedo@msvu.ca](mailto:denel.rehbergsedo@msvu.ca)

I am a graduate student at Mount Saint Vincent University, and I am conducting interviews for my thesis, which is on the subject of the experience of female Members of the Legislature with the communications atmosphere in the House of Assembly.

During this study, you will be asked to answer some questions regarding your experience running for and working within the legislature as an MLA. We will also watch a video of Hansard together which portrays one or two of your experiences in Question Period. This interview is designed to take approximately one hour, however please feel free to expand on the questions or add information that you feel led to share. If there are any questions you would prefer not to answer or that you do not feel comfortable answering, please let me know and we will stop the interview or move on to the next question, whichever you prefer.

Every possible measure will be taken to avoid identifying individual participants, however, it will be difficult to maintain absolute anonymity in the section that discusses Question Period experiences. The context of your experience with Question Period may allow people to arrive at your identity by reviewing Hansard transcripts. This would be limited to this specific section of the research.

All the information gathered will be kept confidential, and I will keep the data in a secure place. Only myself and the faculty thesis supervisor mentioned above will have access to this information. Upon completion of this project, all raw data and interview recordings will be destroyed.

**Research benefits and risks:**

The potential risks of participating in this study may include:

- The questions may raise unpleasant or embarrassing memories or insights
- While names will not be used in the paper, anyone reading it might surmise who the participants may be, due to the small number of female MLAs (past and present) in Nova Scotia, and due to the context of references to Question Period from Hansard.
- Participants may not be comfortable discussing elements of your campaigns
- The interview may be an imposition on participant's time

- For current Members of the Legislature, the discussion and ensuing research may make participants see her role in a different light.

**Hoped-for benefits:**

- A broader understanding of the experience of women who seek and work within Nova Scotia provincial political office
- Insight into challenges in the political system, particularly for women
- Furthering our understanding of potential barriers to women seeking political office, and providing insight to further the cause of equal rights and representation for women

**Participant's Agreement:**

I am aware that my participation in this interview is voluntary. I understand the intent and purpose of this research. If, for any reason, at any time, I wish to stop the interview, I may do so without having to give an explanation.

The researcher has reviewed the individual and social benefits and risks of this project, as outlined above, with me. I am aware the data will be used and published in a Masters-level thesis, which will be on record at Mount Saint Vincent University. I have the right to review, comment on, and/or withdraw information prior to the completion of the thesis. The data gathered in this study is confidential with respect to my personal identity unless I specify otherwise. I understand that if I say anything that I believe may incriminate myself or put me at risk of professional or personal repercussions, the interviewer will record the location of those comments in the digital recorder, and the material will not be used. The interviewer will then ask me if I would like to continue the interview.

I understand that the interview will be recorded.

If I have any questions about this study, I am free to contact the student researcher or the faculty thesis advisor (contact information given above). If I have any questions about my rights as a research participant, I am free to contact Brenda Gagné, Research Ethics Coordinator, Mount Saint Vincent Research Office, 457-6350.

I have been offered a copy of this consent form that I may keep it for my own reference.

I have read the above form, and, with the understanding that I can withdraw at any time and for whatever reason, I consent to participate in today's interview.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer's Signature