Most chapters end with a set of questions meant to highlight the conclusions and concerns raised in the chapter. While certainly a good idea, I felt that Bashevkin's questions may have been subverted if they had considered their relationship to class and race.

Bashevkin's thesis — that women's political participation can be explained as a product of an historical tradition of women's independence of or integration with party systems — explains why Canadian women have been successful around single issues such as suffrage and sections 15 and 28 of the Charter of Rights. She does not, however, address why women are still pursuing these two separate routes. Women have developed successful political organizations independent of the party system. How can these independent organizations inform the present party system in terms of reorganizing to accommodate and encourage women's participation, particularly in dismantling the hierarchical structures of party organizations?

Bashevkin offers an insightful analysis of the inner workings of women's organizations in the party system and we may hope that other women in party organizations will not feel so isolated when they see that their problems are not particular to their party. While Bashevkin claims that she looks at English Canada, I would qualify this by saying that her analysis is derived mainly from Ontario data. Very little of her discussion on party politics is informed by women's experiences in the Maritimes or the West Coast. Her emphasis on English Canadian politics is useful in providing a particular focus, but after reading the book, I felt that even a brief look at French Canada could have fleshed out her analysis. I was left with questions such as: what differentiates the French experiences from those of English Canada; what impact did the cultural revolution have on women's political participation in Quebec; and most importantly, what effect did the establishment of the Parti Québécois have on women in politics in French Canada?

Bashevkin's analysis is successful in debunking myths around women's participation rates in party politics. This suggests that methodologies used to analyze women's participation rates need to be changed. I think her book would be useful in an introductory political science course to inform students about the history of the present participation rates of women in the party system. Her book could also be useful at higher levels to address some of the questions she raises.

The inevitable conclusion we are left with after reading Bashevkin's book is that women are still "toeing the lines," with little movement toward their participation as full and equal members of the political system. It will be a hard line to cross.

THE AMERICAN VICTORIAN WOMAN: THE MYTH AND THE REALITY

Mabel Collins Donnelly. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986.

Myra Rutherdale

In *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History*, American historian Gerda Lerner observed that

> *it would be worthwhile to distinguish the ideas society held at any given age in regard to woman's proper 'place' from what was actually woman's status at that time. The two do not necessarily overlap. On the contrary, there seems to be a considerable gap between the popular myth and the reality.*

Myth vs. reality is the central theme of this welcome new addition to American history and women's studies in which Mabel Collins Donnelly explores a variety of important issues ranging from American Victorian girlhood, menstruation and sexuality to marriage, motherhood, family, physical and mental illness, work and feminism. Through a nice blend of 19th-century literature, medical journals, women's magazines and personal letters and diaries Collins Donnelly successfully recreates life as it was for 19th-century working and middle class women by distinguishing between myth and reality.

It is no coincidence that Collins Donnelly chose to call her book *The American Victorian Woman*. Immediately when one sees the word Victorian one thinks of Victorian morality and all that was supposed to have gone along with it including thrift and respectability. The typical Victorian woman is usually depicted as prudish, leisured and dependent. In a similar study on British middle-class Victorian women, *Silent Sisterhood*, Patricia Branca concludes that the Victorian woman as traditionally portrayed never really existed, at least in Britain. Collins Donnelly confirms that the Victorian woman did not exist in America either.

One by one Collins Donnelly knocks down the pillars upon which the mythology of Victorian womanhood were built. In her chapter on the "Amative Impulse" for example, we are told that women were to indulge in sexual activity only if they were married and then in moderation. The medical profession warned that too much pleasure during sexual intercourse would lead to the ripening of the ova or pregnancy. But Collins Donnelly tells us that in fact "some wives enjoyed their sexuality," and as a survey of middle-class women, taken by Dr. Clelia Mosher, demonstrated the women who were most sexually satisfied practiced some form of birth control.

Another popular notion associated with Victorian women is that they were continually in a sickroom. Clearly medical and particularly gynecological knowledge was unsophisticated and the maternal death rate was extremely high throughout the nineteenth century, but as Collins Donnelly observes "there is no reason to think that Victorian women were any feebler than their forebears; their illnesses simply received more publicity in an age of cheap printing." Victorian women were no more feeble, and in fact, due to medical and scientific developments in the late nineteenth century like the Caesarian section and anesthesia, were less vulnerable than women had been in the previous century.

That the top priority of all Victorian women was to find a husband is another myth which Collins Donnelly seeks to destroy. Rather we are told that some women made the conscious decision not to marry particularly if they had career ambitions. Even more interesting is the revealing evidence provided to show that some middle-class widows actually enjoyed their new-found liberty after their husbands died. What emerges from this book is a new image of Victorian womanhood. We now see that in many respects women were in control of their destiny in the Victorian era. Rather than all women being acted upon by patriarchal society, some women were taking action. By the action of using birth control women were freeing themselves from the worries of further childbearing and childrearing. By choosing not to marry women were freeing themselves to hold a career. And finally by reading medical journals, although to us the ideas seem and indeed are obscure, women of the nineteenth century felt that they were being freed by their knowledge.

Although Collins Donnelly provides an

excellent survey of the false ideas which collectively composed the mythology of woman's place in Victorian America, she fails to go one step further to address the question of why the mythology existed in the first place. Why, for example, would women believe professor of gynecology Dr. Goodell who said that if girls studied too much it would lead to "energy [being] withdrawn from the trophic and reproductive centres, and physical development [being] arrested." Collins Donnelly states that "since... medical doctors were considered major authority figures on many subjects women accepted the[ir] pronouncements." But she does not tell us *why* some women believed these so called authority figures. Were male "authority figures" involved in a conspiracy in order that a patriarchal society be maintained? Further, what connection can be made between science and the mythology of women's place in society? Collins Donnelly points out that the women who enjoyed sex used birth control; therefore there is a connection between science and women's freedom. But she does not elaborate upon this connection. Myths about Victorian womanhood did, and still do, exist. Collins Donnelly is able to show both the reality and the myths, but the book would have benefitted by some discussion about why the myths existed. The book is strongest in the sections where the author focuses on specific reform-minded women who rejected this Victorian mythology.

Mary "Mother" Jones, who was involved with organizing miners and railroad workers, and Sojourner Truth, a black woman who after being freed from slavery dedicated herself to winning the vote for women, as well as other reformers including Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catherine Beecher, Isabella Beecher Hooker, Victoria Claflin Woodhull, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman are some of the women around whom Collins Donnelly builds her book. Even among these articulate women there were those, like Catherine Beecher, who campaigned against discrimination in education yet at the same time held the view that "Woman is the chief master of the family estate in the Christian family." Although there was often infighting and disunity among these reformers, ultimately they too felt themselves imprisoned by the myth of the woman's sphere. This feeling bound them together into a sisterhood which fought, through various methods, as Collins Donnelly states, to "sweep away the myths" of Victorian womanhood.

The Victorian American Woman provides a refreshing interpretation of Victorian womanhood. No longer do we see Victorian women as sexually repressed and spiritually unstimulated. Instead we see women who in reality were beginning to free themselves from the shackles of a patriarchal society. Interesting and original sources, as well as a neat categorization of issues pertinent to women's experience, contribute to a unique view of women in Victorian America.

AFFILIA: JOURNAL OF WOMEN AND SOCIAL WORK

Vol. 1, Nos. 1 and 2 (Spring/Summer 1986). Feminist Press, City University of New York.

Elspeth Heyworth

Social work is a female profession led primarily by men. This statement, found in the conclusion of an article which examines differing ways of conducting social research, sums up succinctly the rationale behind starting up yet another academic journal. The call of this new journal, *Affilia*, is to move women's concerns from the periphery of the profession to its centre.

The articles in these first two issues struggle with developing feminist values, theories and knowledge as they relate to social work research, education and practice. They argue that the profession is over 62 per cent female and, not by chance, two-thirds of the people it works with are women. The problems of social work are the problems of women: the profession ought to be in the forefront of the understanding of women's issues, intervening on their behalf. Instead, these issues have become relegated to the status of a special-interest group.

The figures used are American but the situation is no different in Canada, where the perception of social work as a profession of soft-hearted, soft-minded women who rely on attributes of caring and intuition has frequently led to a countervailing emphasis on quantitative data, verifiable practices, formal and hierarchical structures. Not only have the contributions of women's particular strengths and values disappeared with this shift, but they have carried with them such issues as the global feminisation of poverty which have been de-emphasised to the point of becoming marginal.

And yet women were actually centre-stage both as workers and as focus in the profession's beginnings. In the Settlement House Movement, Jane Addams in Chicago and Sarah Libby Carson in Toronto put their considerable energies into social action and reform. Working with immigrant women and the conditions in which they found themselves meant that gender, race and class became central and inseparable issues. The journal would have done well to refer to these antecedents of the profession — no soft-minded women in that lot — and examine why the focus changed. A historical approach is used in articles on alcoholism and world poverty, but not to trace what happened to those feisty early women workers.

Affilia's content moves to and fro from the large-scale to the particular. The introductory article is rousing and quotable:

> *Women are an international class — the problems they face are basic, universal, timeless. Women are socialised to nurture, but no-one is socialised to nurture them. The ethic of self-determination has become a euphemism for women's oppression at worst and their invisibility at best.*

But it is in the particular and specific that we are drawn into the struggles of how to create change, how the female voice might get heard: instances of pay equity, rural unemployment, a mother's need to care whatever the cost to herself. As each article describes the particular subject and its connection with both writer and larger context, easy certainty is always avoided. The voice of definition and assurance is seen as the male voice; that of uncertainty and creativity leaves room for diversity and individual answers.

Many articles stress the need for a range of perspectives. Feminism has many meanings and there are many strategies for moving towards feminist visions. *Affilia* intends to provide a vehicle for these unheeded voices providing help for those whose style is lacking in grace or clarity; a role model is suggested by the female lawyer who drew up a legal contract for the journal in plain English. For my taste even more jargon can be jettisoned and more articles written by those who practice social work and not just those who teach it. Meanwhile *Affilia* has made an exciting start to showing how social work could make a difference to women, to men and to itself as a profession.