

An Insurrection of Women: Deans of Women and Student Government after the Great War

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that a gap emerged after the Great War between the first deans of women and their students over the meaning of self-government for academic women. Early deans believed from their own undergraduate experience that self-government provided important training for women to perform public roles, and by doing so, to attack the gendered assumption that men alone could have full undergraduate rights. By contrast, women students of the post-war years embraced a different undergraduate identity, one which assumed a greater degree of personal liberty, and their conception of self-government entailed the right to determine and monitor their own rules of conduct. By examining Manitoba, Queen's, Victoria, Toronto's University College, Dalhousie, and Western, this study adds to the existing literature on moral regulation by exploring how deans were able to develop a new view of student government by incorporating a progressive emphasis on the role of graduate women in participatory democracy.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article démontre qu'un fossé est apparu après la Grande Guerre entre les premières Directrices des étudiantes et leurs étudiantes sur la signification de la gouvernance autonome des femmes universitaires. En raison de leur propre expérience au premier cycle, les premières directrices croyaient que cette autonomie offrait une formation importante aux femmes aspirant à occuper des fonctions publiques, tout en contredisant l'hypothèse suggérant que seuls les hommes pouvaient jouir des pleins droits étudiants au premier cycle. En revanche, les étudiantes de l'après-guerre ont adopté une identité différente pour les étudiantes de premier cycle ; une identité reposant sur une plus grande liberté personnelle, et une conception de l'autonomie assumant le droit de déterminer et de contrôler leurs propres règles de conduite. En étudiant les universités Manitoba, Queen's, Victoria, University College (Toronto), Dalhousie et Western, cette étude s'ajoute à la littérature existante sur la réglementation morale en explorant la manière dont les directrices ont pu développer une nouvelle vision du gouvernement étudiant en incorporant progressivement un accent sur le rôle des diplômées dans la démocratie participative.

“No rule can ever be invented which cannot and will not be evaded,” the first dean of women students warned the president of the University of Manitoba in 1924. Ursilla N. Macdonnell then succinctly outlined her philosophy as dean: “The only guarantee of a wholesome and orderly social life is students who respect themselves and prize the good name of their University.”¹ This was not exactly what a university president wanted to hear from a dean of women, whose existence was justified primarily by the expectation that she would, in fact, guarantee a wholesome and orderly life among the female undergraduates. With characteristic directness, however, Macdonnell was expressing her deeply held faith in the importance of women’s self-government. Macdonnell had been appointed in 1920 with the mandate to oversee the academic, social, and athletic activities of all women at Manitoba, a position she would hold until 1944. She had a PhD in history from Queen’s University and had been hired to teach in the History Department in addition to her work as dean. Although Macdonnell’s duties included acting as chaperone at dances and parties and accompanying athletic teams on the road, she believed that university women should have sufficient self-control to regulate their own behaviour. Working closely with the University of Manitoba Students’ Union Women’s Committee, Macdonnell discouraged the more degrading physical forms of first-year initiation and campaigned for better rest rooms, cafeterias, and lounges on campus. In her annual reports, Macdonnell steadily supported democratic student government as a response to concerns about women’s conduct, and she seems to have accepted the excesses of coeducational youth culture in the 1920s with a rare degree of equanimity.²

Like most other early deans of women, Ursilla Macdonnell’s confidence in student government was rooted in her own experience of belonging to one of the first cohorts of women to attend university; as undergraduates, they had struggled to achieve self-government in their literary societies, and now as administrators, they encouraged their students to sustain it within the new residence house committees and student councils of the post-war world. By the turn of the century, coeducation was the dominant form of undergraduate education for women in Canada (see Table 1), and female students had created societies in which they could develop skills in debate and parliamentary procedure, promote women’s interests, and pursue self-government. Building on this foothold, alumnae groups and students had joined together to campaign for space on campus, and between 1899 and 1928, most Canadian universities established women’s residences and appointed deans of women (see Table 2).³

For female students, residences immediately proved to be sources of strength, promoting both a physical and emotional sense of belonging, and challenging head-on the lingering prejudice that women were mere guests in academia. But among officials, residences increasingly became focal points for concern, as female students questioned the authority of the dean of women to prescribe what their behaviour ought to be. In some cases, women’s residences at coeducational universities developed into sites of open conflict. Historians influenced by theorist Judith Butler have explored the ways in which women have responded to opposition to their presence in the public sphere by performing alternative identities, often exploiting weaknesses in the prevailing gender ideology that over time can create new possibilities

Table 1
Dates of Admission* of Women to Canadian Universities

*The admission date given is the year when women were first admitted to all the privileges of undergraduates in arts at that university, including the rights to matriculate, attend lectures, and register in a course of study leading to a degree.

University	Location	Admission Date	Model	Affiliation
Mount Allison	Sackville, NB	1872	Coeducation	Methodist
Queen's	Kingston, ON	1876	Coeducation	Presbyterian
Victoria	Cobourg, ON	1877	Coeducation	Methodist
Acadia	Wolfville, NS	1880	Coeducation	Baptist
Dalhousie	Halifax, NS	1881	Coeducation	Non-denominational
Toronto	Toronto, ON	1884	Coeducation	Provincial
McGill	Montreal, QC	1884	Separate	Non-denominational
Trinity	Toronto, ON	1886 1888 1894	Coeducation Separate Coeducation	Anglican
New Brunswick	Fredericton, NB	1886	Coeducation	Provincial
Manitoba	Winnipeg, MB	1886	Coeducation	Provincial
McMaster	Toronto, ON	1887	Coeducation	Baptist
King's College	Windsor, NS	1893	Coeducation	Anglican
St. Francis Xavier	Antigonish, NS	1894	Separate	Catholic
Western	London, ON	1895	Coeducation	Anglican
Bishop's	Lennoxville, QC	1903	Coeducation	Anglican
Alberta	Strathcona, AB	1906	Coeducation	Provincial
Saskatchewan	Saskatoon, SK	1907	Coeducation	Provincial
British Columbia	Vancouver, BC	1908	Coeducation	Provincial
Ottawa	Ottawa, ON	1919	Separate	Catholic

Table 2
Creation of Dean of Women Position* at Canadian Universities

*Since the title varied by university, two criteria have been used to establish the date of the first dean of women position: first, the position required academic qualifications and was usually accompanied by teaching duties; and secondly, the position entailed responsibility for all women undergraduates.

University	Location	First Women's Residence	Dean of Women Position Created
McGill	Montreal, QC	Royal Victoria College, 1899	1899
Queen's	Kingston, ON	William St. Residence, 1901	1911
Alberta	Edmonton, AB	Pembina Hall, 1919	1911
University College, Toronto	Toronto, ON	Queen's Hall, 1905	1916
Acadia	Wolfville, NS	Crow's Nest, 1909	1919
Victoria	Toronto, ON	Annesley Hall, 1903	1920
Mount Allison	Sackville, NB	Ladies' College Annex, 1912	1920
Manitoba	Winnipeg, MB	Taché Hall, 1912	1920
McMaster	Toronto, ON	Wallingford Hall, 1920	1920
British Columbia	Vancouver, BC	Wesbrook, MacInnes, Bollert Halls, 1951	1921
Dalhousie	Halifax, NS	Forrest Hall, 1912	1923
Western	London, ON	Alpha House, 1928	1926
Saskatchewan	Saskatoon, SK	Saskatchewan Hall, 1912	1944
New Brunswick	Fredericton, NB	Maggie Jean Chestnut House, 1949	1960

for women's roles. Employing the concept of gender performance, this article argues that a growing gap emerged after the Great War between the first deans of women and their students over the meaning of self-government for academic women. Early deans such as Macdonnell believed from their own undergraduate experience that self-government was an important training ground for women to perform public roles — to debate, serve on committees, and run meetings—and by doing so to attack the gendered assumption that the right to full participation in college life belonged to male undergraduates alone. The extension of undergraduate rights to female students in the nineteenth century had been premised on the understanding that they would regulate themselves and perform these roles without the unruliness and corruption that seemed to characterize men's activities. Women leaders anxiously watched the growing backlash against coeducation, recognizing, as many of their students did not, just how precarious their place was in male academic life.⁴ By contrast, women students of the post-war years embraced a different undergraduate identity, one which assumed a greater degree of liberty to stay out late, attend public dance halls, and meet with male friends in the city, and their conception of self-government entailed the right to determine and monitor their own rules of conduct. E. Lisa Panayotidis and Paul Stortz have argued that women's associations used such group activities as initiation rituals to contest societal expectations of comportment and participate more fully in university life.⁵ This study explores the way in which deans of women responded to conflict by developing a progressive position on the role of women in democracy, while attempting to accommodate and redirect their students' demands for more independence.

Historians have interpreted the appointment of deans of women in light of the increased moral regulation of female students, and have explored the stresses inherent to a position that entailed both advocacy for women's needs and surveillance of their behaviour.⁶ The years spanning the First World War were marked by change for women students. Social opportunities expanded, new ideas circulated, and a variety of different groups competed for students' allegiance. In addition to the more traditional activities of the Young Women's Christian Association and the Women's Literary Society, most college towns also became places where women could dance, date, play hockey, talk about politics, or, after the extension of the federal franchise in 1918, vote. While not all of these activities were new, officials began more frequently to express a sense of unease when they reflected on the conduct of female students. During the war, existing strains became accentuated by their new prominence, and original restraints imposed by chaperones, lady superintendents, and matrons seemed to lack real authority. Women became more forceful in student governance, particularly within the residences, and officials responded with regulations designed to curb their behaviour on campus and restrict their freedom of movement beyond it.⁷

The universities adopted a policy of supervision for women students, conveyed by the term *in loco parentis*, which became the explicit responsibility of the dean of women. As Catherine Gidney has maintained, nineteenth-century universities were regarded as moral communities in the liberal, Protestant tradition, where administrators and professors were responsible as much for their students' character formation

as for their academic advancement. The interwar system of moral regulation, however, involved the complex interaction of deans, dons, and student councils. Within the residences, the deans hoped to work through student government, and the students themselves negotiated and often challenged the rules. The rules guiding the behaviour of students living on campus remained significantly different for women than for men well into the 1960s.⁸ By exploring the work of early deans of women at Manitoba, Queen's, Victoria, University College of the University of Toronto, Dalhousie, and Western, this study will add to existing literature on moral regulation by placing it in the context of challenges to self-government, specifically by analyzing the conflict that emerged between the deans and their students over how a woman's undergraduate identity could and should be performed.

At most Canadian universities, the position of dean evolved from the job of residence head, but the title "dean of women" came to mean something very specific to the people who campaigned for their appointments. Deans of women became an influential group in the United States during the pre-war years, linked closely to the spread of coeducation and rising female enrolments. Many Canadian advocates, such as the United Alumnae in Toronto, pushed for similar appointments in their own universities. For these campaigners, the dean of women had to meet two criteria that set her position apart from the purely residence-based appointments of the past: first, she had to have academic qualifications and hopefully a teaching position in the university; and secondly, she had to have responsibility for all women undergraduates, whether or not they lived in residence. As Table 2 shows, most Canadian universities at this time appointed a female administrator who met these criteria, although their titles varied. In the eyes of alumnae, a dean would ideally serve to mentor the young students under her charge, and fulfil a broad mandate to promote the academic interests of women in the university. One writer explained: "She must be a woman of direct methods, a scholar and a believer in scholarship."⁹ Yet the students themselves often regarded the appointment of a dean of women with hostility, resenting what they saw as an infringement on their hard-won rights as undergraduates, particularly on the autonomy of their literary societies, councils, and residence house committees. In this they were not wrong. University officials expected the deans to regulate behaviour; wary already of the freedom with which female students explored the city, many were prompted to review regulations and limit the extent of self-government. At Queen's, Victoria, and Toronto's University College, the first three coeducational universities to open women's residences, the conduct of female undergraduates became a focal point of controversy during and immediately after the war.¹⁰

At Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, the principal, Daniel Gordon, was critical of the state of coeducation, pointing out in his annual report in 1911 that women were not integrated fully into the academic and social life of the university, that they lacked a central place on campus, and required more guidance in selecting appropriate programs from among courses that were framed primarily for men. To address these concerns, the university appointed Caroline E. McNeill to the position of advisor of women, a title that was changed in 1916 to dean of women. McNeill had an MA degree, had been a professor of romance languages and dean of women at

Bates College in Maine, and would eventually become a part-time lecturer in French and Spanish at Queen's.¹¹ By this time, the university had an established system of self-government among women students, led by the executive of the women's literary association, the Levana Society. Beginning in 1901, when the alumnae had opened the first women's residence, student government had expanded to include residence house committees, and by 1917, there were three women's residences operating in houses off-campus. The residences were nominally under the supervision of wardens, but the students had quickly organized their own committees to establish house rules, and in reality, they enjoyed a significant degree of independence. Former students remembered living by a flexible set of rules, with the freedom to go out on dates, skate, dance, or attend the theatre. The house committees were elected every year, and their rules tended to reinforce a hierarchy based on seniority; first-year residents, for example, were assigned the duties of lamp lighting, telephone answering, and door opening. Levana had opposed the idea of a dean of women, arguing that the position would erode the responsibility of the senior students and destroy the bonds among female undergraduates.¹² Principal Gordon attempted to reconcile Levana to McNeill's authority, carefully explaining in his annual report: "The appointment of such an adviser would not be for oversight of the conduct of the students or for any purpose of discipline, as there is no suggestion of any existing need in these respects."¹³

Caroline McNeill believed that self-government was ineffectual as it currently existed at Queen's, and her first actions were intended to strengthen the system and bring the residence house committees as well as Levana under her influence. During her first few years as dean, McNeill prepared a revised constitution with a formalized list of regulations, and established a Levana council of twenty members, distinct from the executive, to serve as a court of discipline to enforce these rules among all women students.¹⁴ Having reorganized the Levana Society, Caroline McNeill then turned her attention to what she saw as unruly behaviour in the residences and the inability of the house committees to maintain good discipline, particularly concerning the treatment of first-year students during initiation rituals. The senior students fought back, and in 1917, they brought a complaint against the dean of women to the board, protesting that McNeill had interfered unduly with their right to self-government by restricting initiation activities within the residences. Although Principal Gordon intervened on behalf of the students and suggested that the dean might have been misled about the nature of initiation rites in the residences, his successor, R. Bruce Taylor, agreed with McNeill that initiations and rushes were dangerous and weakened the authority of student governance. Following the death of a female student in 1922, Taylor upheld the dean's restrictions and all the student societies, including Levana, were pressured to abandon physical initiation activities.¹⁵ In 1925, Hilda Laird was appointed to succeed McNeill as dean of women and given the responsibility of running Ban Righ Hall, the new women's residence and union, as well as supervising the academic and social life of female undergraduates. Laird had graduated from Queen's in 1918, and she taught as a part-time lecturer in German. Although, like McNeill, she frequently sparred with senior students, Laird attempted to strengthen the administrative functions of student governance. She established an elected council of

students to manage discipline within Ban Righ Hall and invited Levana and the other women's associations to move to the residence, where she personally attended their meetings and social functions.¹⁶

Similar tensions occurred at the University of Toronto, where female students in residence clashed with their deans at both Victoria and University colleges. By the end of the First World War, Toronto had become a large, diverse university, and in addition to the original University College, Toronto's federated arts colleges now included Victoria (1887), Trinity (1904), and St. Michael's (1910). Women at Victoria and University colleges had a long tradition of self-government in their literary societies, but with the expansion of the university, female students saw the opportunity to organize a broader system of governance that went beyond their college or faculty associations. In 1919, the Women Students' Administrative Council of the University of Toronto was established by students enrolled in the four arts colleges—University College, Victoria, St. Hilda's at Trinity, and St. Michael's—as well as in social service, education, and medicine. The new Women Students' Administrative Council successfully petitioned the senate to have a compulsory annual fee levied on all women students, with the goal of achieving joint financial responsibility with the Men's Student Administrative Council.¹⁷

This development was also reflected at the college level, as women within the residences began to organize more assertively to shape the rules regulating their conduct and freedom of movement. In 1903, Victoria had opened Annesley Hall for women on campus, with Margaret Addison as dean of residence, and in 1906, the residents had created the Annesley Student Government Association. Addison had graduated from Victoria in 1889; she had been an active member of the Literary Society herself, and fully supported the principle of self-government. While she encouraged student government at Annesley, Addison was disappointed by the growing number of societies, committees, and social life on campus. She thought students were becoming less studious and more boisterous, and regarded women's self-government at Victoria as a good training ground for character development and preparation for public life, in the same way that to be a graduate of Oxford was a guarantee that a man was a gentleman. Addison collaborated with her students in preparing the house committee's constitution and rules of conduct, and remained optimistic in her annual reports that this experience of democracy would successfully promote higher ideals and a greater sense of responsibility.¹⁸ The students themselves seem to have regarded Addison as a stickler for rules; in a diary of residence life at Annesley from 1907 to 1910, Kathleen Cowan recorded that their first meeting with the dean “turned out to be a lecture on must and must-nots.”¹⁹

Yet in the years before the war, Margaret Addison's management of Annesley was criticized as too permissive. In 1911, the chancellor of Victoria, Nathanael Burwash, expressed his concerns: “I am told that many students have the habit of sitting up and visiting in their rooms until 12 o'clock at night, that students are allowed the privilege of going out on visits every night in the week, and that students have gone to dances without a chaperone and to dances probably the character and conduct of which we know nothing, and have come in as late as 2 o'clock in the morning.”²⁰

After an intense review by the Victoria senate, a second commission was appointed to investigate new charges of lax discipline, this time that Annesley residents had attended theatres and dances late into the night. Addison vigorously defended student government, and meticulously documented the women's attendance at plays and dances. In 1912, the senate upheld Addison's leadership and permitted student government in the residence to continue.²¹

Women's self-government continued to be controversial at Victoria. In 1914, women protested the way in which the all-male Student Board of Control treated female students. They created their own council, known subsequently as the Women's Undergraduate Association of Victoria College, to manage all matters concerning the conduct and activities of female students. In 1921, members of the Women's Literary Society discussed their exclusion from key positions in student governance, resolving that the principal offices on the *Acta Victoriana* board, such as that of editor and business manager, should be open to women as well as men.²² Margaret Addison had noticed this growing restlessness among women students during the war years, commenting in her report in 1917 that Annesley residents were "showing a wholesome dissatisfaction with many institutions which they have before accepted without query."²³ Following the imposition in 1919 of a university-wide decree, discussed below, forbidding all women students from attending dance halls or downtown restaurants in the city, the Annesley student government held a series of excited meetings with Addison in which they demanded a modernization of the residence rules. Addison noted sadly that "the love of pleasure and the license which are the aftermath of war are no small part of our concern in the women's residences of the University."²⁴ In response to concerns about this kind of behaviour, the Victoria board decided to extend the dean's authority beyond the residences. In 1920, Margaret Addison was appointed dean of women, with the responsibility of advising all female undergraduates in their social and religious activities, as well as supervising life in the dormitories, dining hall, and common rooms. Over the next decade, Annesley students eventually won some concessions, bringing in a later curfew, allowing them to eat at restaurants and hotels, attend university dances, and go out walking or driving with men in the evening, and finally, in 1926, permitting a dance to be held in the residence.²⁵

At Toronto's University College, students in the Queen's Hall residence also protested restrictions on their ability to formulate their own regulations. Like women at Victoria, the college's female students had self-government in the Women's Literary Society, and after 1914, in the Women's Undergraduate Association of University College. Queen's Hall had opened in 1905 under the management of a dean, and the residents soon introduced student government in the form of a house committee to oversee discipline. Yet by the war years, the women's residence had developed a reputation for loose behaviour and lax discipline: "the Queen's Hall lot were thought to be rather gay, you see," Mossie May Waddington Kirkwood, a former dean of women, later remembered.²⁶ Rumours of cliques repeatedly surfaced among students, and they were aggravated by the growing rivalry of the college's new sororities. In 1914, the dean of Queen's Hall, Mrs. John Campbell, resigned her position following a disagreement with the student house committee, and the enforcement of residence

rules continued to deteriorate under her successor, Louise Livingstone. At the time of Livingstone's appointment, *The Varsity* noted perceptively that the constitution of the student government was far too vague, and the students' powers needed to be clearly defined in relation to those of the dean.²⁷

The situation at University College soon became more fraught. In 1916, Margaret Wrong was appointed to the position of lady resident of the new University College Women's Union, and authority over women students became a matter of dispute between Wrong and the dean of Queen's Hall. The University College alumnae had pressed for the appointment of a dean of women, arguing that an academic leader was needed who could be appointed to the faculty to take on teaching duties, as well as to provide guidance for female students. Although University College did not bestow the title of dean of women until 1926, Wrong's position in reality had those responsibilities, as she was charged with supervising the behaviour and academic progress of all women undergraduates both off-campus and in residence. Wrong herself had been a student at University College, but had left without completing her degree to attend Somerville College, Oxford. She had returned to Toronto in 1914, and was studying for a master's degree and working as a lecturer in history when she was hired as lady resident. Wrong grew frustrated with the trivial demands on her time—shopping, chaperoning, bookkeeping, and entertaining—that took her attention away from what she felt should be the more important academic function of her position. She pushed the university, without success, to appoint another staff member to do the housekeeping and to allow her a seat on the council of the Faculty of Arts.²⁸ “The Union is regarded as the centre for the women of the college,” she pointed out in 1921, “and the Head is looked upon by them as a Dean of Women would be in an American College.”²⁹

In 1919, problems within Queen's Hall escalated, and the entire student house committee resigned after a confrontation with Dean Livingstone over discipline. The principal of University College, Maurice Hutton, and the University College council decided essentially to suspend student government and impose more stringent regulations for Queen's Hall residents, including restrictions on late leaves to attend theatres, public dance halls, and restaurants. This in turn sparked a mass protest of women students at Queen's Hall. Arguing that student government had been undermined by the arbitrary transferral of power from the house committee to Livingstone, the Queen's Hall students refused to enforce laws that were not of their own legislation. The stand-off between the Queen's Hall women and the administration mobilized opinion across the University of Toronto. According to *The Varsity*, most undergraduates, both male and female, sided with Queen's Hall on the grounds that an important principle was at stake, the right to democratic self-government. *The Varsity* commented: “The meeting decided that if the Council insisted upon passing rules obnoxious to the whole body of University women, they would have to enforce them themselves.”³⁰ Fourth-year students living at Queen's Hall sent a long letter of protest to the University of Toronto president, Robert Falconer, objecting that the actions of Hutton and the University College council, “had taken away self-government by the abolition of one of its functions, the making of laws.”³¹

For other female deans and faculty on campus, however, the behaviour at Queen's Hall not only challenged discipline within the residences, but threatened to overturn the gains women had made in claiming space in the university. In response, the heads of Annesley Hall, St. Hilda's, Queen's Hall, and Household Science, as well as of the women's unions at University College and Victoria, convened a committee to decide on campus-wide regulations for women students. This committee sent their own letter to President Falconer, urging him to take steps to curb social activities among students, and in particular to restrict women undergraduates from being downtown in the evenings. As a result, all female students in all colleges and faculties at the University of Toronto were forbidden explicitly to attend dance halls in the city.³² The notoriety surrounding these events led to further censure of female undergraduates and calls for more responsible supervision. In her report to the University College council, Margaret Wrong warned that alumnae teaching in schools outside of Toronto were concerned about bad standards in residence; the discipline of the Women's Undergraduate Association was ineffectual, and standards of university dances were below even those of public dances in the city. In the fall of 1919, the University College Women's Union opened a residence of its own, named Hutton House, and the students were placed directly under Wrong's management without any student house committee. In 1921, Margaret Wrong resigned. Disillusioned with self-government, she urged that steps be taken immediately, "to control the behaviour of women students in the public buildings of the University."³³ Near the end of that tumultuous winter term of 1919, *The Varsity* summarized the events of the previous months with a cartoon showing female students marching with Queen's Hall banners. The caption read: "The Insurrection of the Women."³⁴

The unrest among female undergraduates at the end of the war was problematic for the deans of women. To the deans and their advocates among the alumnae, the success of women's student government was premised on self-restraint, and the demands of young women for greater control over their activities seemed more and more antithetical to maintaining their fragile gains in academia. Alumnae groups were proud of the institutional gains they had made. Residences created defined space and provided employment for women, and female faculty were quick to see the benefits of securing this niche in the universities. The residences also promoted the growth of health services, where deans of women worked alongside non-academic staff and health-care professionals to improve the living conditions of female students.³⁵ But the support of the alumnae carried some ambivalence, as women recognized the threat to coeducation inherent to the creation of specialized space.

While separate buildings had the positive impact of eroding women's nebulous status as guests, they nevertheless served to draw attention to the otherness of female students and professors. At its most extreme, this tendency resulted in the assumption that the provision of a residence and the supervision of a dean of women was actually a necessary precondition to coeducation. At St. John's College of the University of Manitoba, the warden, George Anderson Wells, considered the presence of women to be particularly problematic; he believed that since the college had no residence for them, women should not even be admitted. In 1922, St. John's returned to an

all-male undergraduate body and women were not readmitted until 1931.³⁶ This sense of not really belonging to academia was accentuated by the rise of a seemingly hedonistic social life after the war, one which forced a new image, that of the frivolous coed, into the public glare. Female undergraduates bore the brunt of criticism for the perceived shallowness of youth culture on campus, reviving deeply rooted anxieties that the integration of women into men's universities would destroy moral and academic standards in equal measure.³⁷ As one professor at Western remembered, "Flappers were flapping even in University halls."³⁸ Many young Canadians regarded themselves as belonging to a new age, and asserted the modernity of their generation by dancing to jazz, smoking, or drinking gin. Advertisements prompted women to wear makeup and silk stockings, and to show their bodies in dresses designed to be light and revealing.³⁹ Over the next decade, deans of women carefully negotiated the conflicting demands of their positions, caught between the imperatives of controlling students' behaviour to protect women's place in the university, and their own conviction that self-government was an essential part of the undergraduate experience.

During the 1920s, coeducation again came under attack, and plans for separating men and women in arts classes were considered at various universities, including Queen's and Dalhousie. The deans of women were placed on the defensive. In his annual reports, Principal Taylor at Queen's became highly critical of the decline of discipline, the post-war mania for pleasure, and the weakness of the Alma Mater Society as an effective student government. This idle element was for him in a very real way the product of the coeducational environment, where students wasted time dancing and going to parties. In 1924, at the Arts Society annual dinner, a professor harshly condemned the entire system of coeducation, and the editor of the *Queen's Journal* agreed that there was considerable truth underlying this comment. In response, Caroline McNeill publicly disputed the implication that women in particular were responsible, pointing out that only a small percentage of the female students were flappers. She also noted, quite astutely, that there were as many flappers among the men as the women.⁴⁰ Principal Taylor, however, believed that women's academic standards had deteriorated, and that female attendance at the university was now a matter of convention rather than an indication of exceptional purpose and ability. "One main disadvantage," he noted in 1927, "is that where there is lack of seriousness, whether in men or women, it is apt to be accentuated by the opportunities which co-education gives."⁴¹

These issues at Queen's culminated in the student strike of 1928, when the undergraduates boycotted classes for one day to protest the actions of the senate in imposing disciplinary measures in cases involving fighting, drinking, and organizing a dance, cases that normally would have been handled entirely by student government. The senate and principal, in turn, believed that the Alma Mater Society had shirked its duty and failed to maintain acceptable standards of conduct. Although many Levana members actually had been opposed to the strike—the residents of Ban Righ Hall decided as a group not to boycott classes—the events surrounding it served to focus the attention of administrators on the perceived dangers of coeducation, and the dean of women, Hilda Laird, was asked to monitor women students more

carefully. By 1930, Laird had developed new regulations that provided greater supervision for first-year and off-campus students and instituted specific rules controlling the dress, comportment, and social activities of female undergraduates. All first-year women under the age of twenty-five and away from their families were required to live in the university residence, a regulation not applied to male students.⁴²

At Dalhousie University in Halifax, administrators were having similar misgivings. The grimness of the war years had been superseded by a heady enthusiasm among young people for entertainment, and students had embraced the rapid spread of sororities, fraternities, clubs, and societies, with a corresponding rise in social events. The advisor to women students, E. Margaret Lowe, objected strongly to the excessive numbers of dances and parties attended by female students. A graduate of the University of Toronto, Lowe had been appointed in 1923 to the position of advisor and warden of Shirreff Hall, the new women's residence, and in addition, had taken on teaching responsibilities in French and English. The roles of advisor and warden were inseparable, since Dalhousie's regulations explicitly stated that, except in very unusual circumstances, all women students not living with their parents had to live in residence. There was no such stipulation compelling men to live in residence.⁴³ Like Margaret Addison, Lowe began to favour separate education as a possible solution to the overly social undergraduate culture, especially for younger, less mature women. In her 1930 report, Lowe recommended that female students take separate classes during their first two years of study, and that several women tutors be hired to assist them. "They have had co-education throughout their public and high school courses," Lowe wrote, "and it would be interesting to see what results would be obtained from one or two years of separation in the class room, to the advantage of both men and women just entering college, when everything combines to hinder concentration at the very moment when they are left more dependent on themselves than ever before." Lowe focused specifically on the number of dances and the pressure put on young women to attend them with dates, and she felt that the dances themselves were cliquey and exclusive. Lowe bluntly informed the president: "If we have co-education, co-educational problems should be faced."⁴⁴ The *Dalhousie Gazette* agreed with her, and an editorial in 1930 commented that a "dance-mad Dalhousie" would result in lower academic standards, impoverished students, and a bad reputation for the university.⁴⁵

In this quickening social environment, deans of women struggled to reconcile their confidence in self-government with the more permissive expectations of students living in residence. Some, like Margaret Wrong, gave up on the principle altogether; other deans of women adopted a more flexible approach, condoning a greater degree of freedom while seeking to inspire their students to demonstrate higher standards of social responsibility and group loyalty. By doing so, these deans were able to develop a new view of student government, one that accommodated demands for more independence with a revised emphasis on the role of graduate women in a participatory democracy. This development reflected the growing influence of progressive education among American and Canadian educators, as provincial departments of education began to explore curricula changes that encouraged students to internalize self-regulation as an essential component of training in democracy.⁴⁶

At Western University in London, Ontario, the dean of women, Ruby C. E. Mason, believed that self-government was an integral part of the undergraduate experience precisely because it trained women for public roles in a democratic society. For this reason, Mason actively promoted the establishment of a women's residence. "Residence life develops group loyalty," she explained in 1928, "contributes to character building through developing capacity for team work, evolves a sense of social responsibility, directs energies into socially acceptable channels, offers recognition for tasks successfully performed, and induces forte for leadership."⁴⁷ Mason was a graduate of the University of Toronto, and she had been appointed as the first dean of women in 1926, with additional teaching duties in the Department of English. She had extensive previous experience as a dean of women at the universities of Indiana and Illinois and became an advocate for women's residences chiefly because they provided the opportunity for self-government, something she felt was lacking among women at Western.⁴⁸ The original Literary Society had been coeducational, but during the war, students developed an interest in separate organizations, such as the Aeropagus Society, which was revived in 1915 to be "strictly a men's organization."⁴⁹ In 1920, the Students' Council, later renamed the Students' Administrative Assembly, was formed to administer discipline and regulate undergraduate conduct. The Students' Council was officially coeducational, but always headed by a male student, the prefect, and matters relating to women were managed by the sub-prefect and senior girl.⁵⁰

One of Ruby Mason's first steps at Western was to encourage her students to establish the Undergraduate Women's Organization to oversee women's activities on campus. She also turned her attention to a range of issues for women students, organizing first-aid rooms in the buildings, regulating the introduction of sororities, and creating strict guidelines that stipulated that men and women could not live in the same boarding houses. Most urgent, in Mason's view, was the creation of a residence where women could acquire the team-building and leadership skills necessary for public life. While some Western women lived at Ursuline College, the majority lived in boarding houses in the city. In 1928, frustrated by the lack of university support for the project, Mason herself opened a small residence, Alpha House, in her own home off-campus, and a year later, established a second residence nearby named Beta Hall. Together, the two houses accommodated only forty students, and both suffered from underfunding. Both residences were closed in 1932 when Mason resigned her position as dean of women due to ill health, and Spencer Hall, the permanent women's residence at Western, was not opened until 1951.⁵¹ In spite of Mason's high esteem for student government, the residents themselves seem to have found her supervision too restrictive. In 1930, the president of Western, W. Sherwood Fox, suggested that "the girls who reside in [Beta Hall] must be given a greater measure of independence and responsibility than was accorded them last year."⁵²

On the large campus of the University of Toronto, women and men became more divided in their academic programs and student government, even as a coeducational culture emerged that emphasized social interactions. One contributor to *The Rebel* wrote in 1919: "Although there is ample opportunity for meeting in social functions,

much of the intellectual activity which centres about the University is carried on entirely separately: literary, dramatic, athletic, historical and debating societies.”⁵³ In 1921, after Margaret Wrong resigned, Mossie May Waddington Kirkwood was appointed resident head of the University College Women’s Union. Kirkwood had a PhD in philosophy and taught English at both Trinity and University colleges. She agreed to the appointment only on the condition that her authority was strengthened by the hiring of a dietician to manage the housekeeping. In 1926, Kirkwood’s title was changed to dean of women at University College, a role she held until 1929, and in 1936, she became principal of St. Hilda’s College and dean of women at Trinity. Kirkwood faced the challenges of the divided university by trying to revitalize women’s self-government. Her first actions at University College were designed to encourage unity and get first-year students involved, and she collaborated with the Women’s Undergraduate Association to introduce a new system of class executives, and to ensure that notices of athletic games, literary debates, and club meetings were posted in all the residences. Maintaining that senior students had a particular role to play in promoting fellowship, Kirkwood urged upper-year women to enrich the life of the whole by fostering a sense of cohesion and responsibility in the college.⁵⁴ In her 1925 report, Kirkwood explained the value she saw in self-government: “The College societies severally teach people human nature, train their members to express themselves with ease, give them experience of business, help them to work with other people harmoniously—and all together they promote that cohesion and unity which should be the heart of the College.”⁵⁵ In 1938, Kirkwood published a summary of her reflections, “On Government in College,” in which she argued that the trend in contemporary academic institutions was democratic, and that one of the most valuable aspects of a college experience was that it introduced students to questions connected with law and government. “At first it may be that participation in students affairs amount to no more than bewildered voting for class officials, or taking part in the humble duties assigned to freshmen in some colleges,” she noted. “Later it may mean hard work on committees, or as a class president, or as a senior who conscientiously uses her influence and example in maintaining decent standards of work in her dormitory.”⁵⁶

The new deans of women walked a tightrope, necessarily balancing the expectations of the officials who hired them and those of the students they supervised. These deans were committed profoundly to the advancement of women in the universities; they came from among the first generations to earn degrees, and by the 1920s, were in the unenviable position of watching attacks on coeducation erode the extent of access they themselves had enjoyed. The assertiveness of women in contests over self-government during the war served to exacerbate the undercurrent of hostility to coeducation, and the movement towards residential and academic segregation defined the experience of female undergraduates. While arts classes continued to be offered coeducationally, over the next four decades most women taking professional degrees were directed into feminized programs. The first deans valued their own tradition of self-government, and attempted initially to strengthen rather than combat the councils and house committees under their management. Yet often they had to enforce

regulations that set female students apart and restricted them from fully participating in undergraduate activities.

Drawing on the concept of gender performance, this article has argued that the unrest in the residences represented a clash of perceptions between the deans and their students over the meaning of self-government for women. In particular, the disputes threatened to capsize the faith held by all early deans that self-government entailed self-regulation; by providing women with essential training for public life, it allowed them to excel in roles previously reserved solely for male students. Deans of women were confronted instead by their students' claim to a very different undergraduate identity. What Caroline McNeill, Margaret Addison, and Margaret Wrong saw as a fondness for pleasure and excitement was viewed by many female undergraduates as an assertion of their right, like male students, to use self-government to extend the limits of their campus experience. "I am not so sure that co-education is having the beneficial effect upon either the male or female members of the University that its advocates claim it does," the warden of St. John's College told *The Manitoban* in 1931. "As far as I can see the girls are becoming too much like men and the men too much like women."⁵⁷ Women students resented being placed in a special category not applied to male undergraduates; as a Mount Allison student had pointed out in 1906, "any young woman who is fitted to enter upon university studies should not be hedged about by school-girl rules."⁵⁸ After the Great War, deans of women were required to negotiate their authority and reconcile their need to both regulate and protect women's place in the university. At its best, this process of negotiation was exemplified by deans such as Margaret Lowe, Ruby Mason, and Mossie May Kirkwood, who worked carefully with student government to allow women a greater degree of personal liberty while trying to encourage progressive democratic values. Reflecting on her previous seven years at Dalhousie, Margaret Lowe observed in 1930 that these democratic values were inherent to self-government, causing women students to develop a healthy sense of honour and social responsibility in their public life. She concluded: "They also go out after graduation better prepared to take responsibility if they have begun in their senior years in college."⁵⁹

Notes

- 1 Ursilla N. Macdonnell, Report of Dean of Women Students, 1923–24, University of Manitoba Annual Reports, University of Manitoba Archives (UMA).
- 2 Ursilla N. Macdonnell, Reports of Dean of Women Students, 1921–22, 1922–23, 1923–24, 1924–25, 1925–26, 1926–27, 1927–28, 1928–29, 1929–30, University of Manitoba Annual Reports, UMA; "University of Manitoba Students' Union," *Brown and Gold*, 1921, 8–9; "U.M.S.U. Women's Council," *Brown and Gold*, 1922, 29–30; "Women's Committee of the U.M.S.U. Council," *Brown and Gold*, 1930, 11.
- 3 The information provided in Tables 1 and 2 is based on research for my book-length study, *The Question of Coeducation: The Admission of Women into Canadian Universities*, currently in preparation for publication. College Board and Senate Minutes, May 26, 1872, 44–45, Mount Allison University, Mount Allison University Archives (MAUA); "Ladies' College Notes," *The Argosy*, October 1912, 60–61; Raymond Clare Archibald,

- Historical Notes on the Education of Women at Mount Allison, 1854–1954* (Sackville, NB: Centennial Committee, Mount Allison University, 1954), 8–19; *Baptist Year Book of the Maritime Provinces of the Dominion of Canada* (Halifax: Messenger Printing Office, 1881), 28; “Acadia Seminary Jubilee,” *Acadia Bulletin*, April 1, 1912, 2–3; “A Dean for Women,” *Acadia Bulletin* 8, no. 8 (September 1919): 8; Margaret Conrad, Elizabeth Rice, and Patricia Townsend, *Women at Acadia University: The First Fifty Years, 1884–1934* (Kentville, NS: Kentville Publishing, n.d.), 4–19; Elizabeth H. D. LaPierre de St. Rémy, February 1, 1876, Register of Students, University of Queen’s College, Queen’s University Archives (QUA); Barbara M. Foote, September 19, 1877, Register of Students, 1872–1892, 75–6, Victoria University, fonds 2093, 1987.146V, Victoria University Archives (VUA); Board of Governors Minutes, July 9, 1881, Dalhousie University, Dalhousie University Archives (DUA); copy of an Order in Council, approved by His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor, the 2nd day of October, A.D. 1884, Paper no. 58, “Return of Copies of All Correspondence between the Government and the Council of University College, Respecting the Admission of Women to that Institution,” *Sessional Papers*, 1885, Ontario, Legislative Assembly; J. William Dawson, *Report on the Higher Education of Women* (Montreal: Corporation of McGill University, 1884), 1–3; H. D. [Hilda Diana] Oakeley, “The Royal Victoria College,” *University Magazine* 1, no. 1 (December 1901): 85–92; “St. Hilda’s College,” *Trinity University Review*, February 1889, 26; Senate Minutes, University of New Brunswick, book 3, November 19, 1885, 349, and June 18, 1886, 360, UA RG 40, University of New Brunswick Archives (UNBA); Linda Squiers Hansen, “*Those Certain Women*: A History of the Associated Alumnae, UNB (Fredericton, NB: Associated Alumnae of UNB, 1982), 21–40; Jessie Holmes Munro to Mrs. McColl, March 23, 1937, Canadian Federation of University Women fonds, MG 28, I 196, vol. 8, file 32, Library and Archives Canada (LAC); “Manitoba College: Some Notes on the Opening of the Present Session,” *Manitoba Free Press*, September 25, 1886; Irene K. Best, “Homemakers’ Course,” *M.A.C. Gazette*, February 1912, 79–81; “College News: McMaster Hall,” *McMaster University Monthly*, June 1891, 42; Memorandum of Understanding Between McMaster University and the Alumnae Association with Reference to Ladies’ Residence, n.d., Office of the Registrar fonds, McMaster University, box 105, sub group A, Canadian Baptist Archives (CBA); Donna Yavorsky Ronish, “Sweet Girl Graduates: The Admission of Women to English-Speaking Universities in Canada in the Nineteenth Century” (PhD diss., Université de Montréal, 1985), 480–503, 530–47; An Act to Establish and Incorporate a University for the Province of Alberta, 1906, Alberta, Legislative Assembly; Ellen Schoeck, *I Was There: A Century of Alumni Stories about the University of Alberta* (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 2006), 90–92, 121–23; Michael Hayden, *Seeking A Balance: The University of Saskatchewan, 1907–1982* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1983), 7, 71, 185; Michel Prévost, “Chronologie de l’histoire des femmes à l’Université d’Ottawa,” 31 mars 2011, Archives de l’Université d’Ottawa.
- 4 I develop this argument further in Sara Z. Burke, “Becoming Undergraduates: Women and University Culture in Nineteenth-Century Canada,” in *Women in Higher Education, 1850–1970: International Perspectives*, ed. E. Lisa Panayotidis and Paul Stortz (New York: Routledge, 2016), 97–118. For Judith Butler’s theory of gender performance and performativity, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 134–41; Jo Burr Margadant, “Introduction: Constructing Selves in Historical Perspective,” in *The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. Jo Burr Margadant (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 2–3.
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- 6 Jean O'Grady, *Margaret Addison: A Biography* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 118–206; Alyson E. King, "Centres of 'Home-Like Influence': Residences for Women at the University of Toronto," *Material History Review* 49 (1999): 39–59; Alyson E. King, "The Experience of the Second Generation of Women Students at Ontario Universities, 1900–1930," (PhD diss., Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1999), 159–97; Johanna M. Selles, *Methodists and Women's Education in Ontario, 1836–1925* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 182–207; Lee Stewart, *"It's Up to You": Women at UBC in the Early Years* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990), 66–78; Margaret Gillett, *We Walked Very Warily: A History of Women at McGill* (Montreal: Eden Press Women's Publications, 1981), 151–219. For analyses of deans of women at American universities, see Christine D. Myers, *University Coeducation in the Victorian Era: Inclusion in the United States and the United Kingdom* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Andrea G. Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch: Women and Coeducation in the American West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 48–78; Andrea Walton, "Achieving a Voice and Institutionalizing a Vision for Women: The Barnard Deanship at Columbia University, 1889–1947," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 13, no. 2 (2001): 113–46; Lynn D. Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 52–120.
- 7 Sara Z. Burke, "Dancing into Education: The First World War and the Roots of Change in Women's Higher Education," in *Cultures, Communities, and Conflict: Histories of Canadian Universities and War*, ed. Paul Stortz and E. Lisa Panayotidis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 95–120; Burke, "Becoming Undergraduates," in *Women in Higher Education*, 97–118.
- 8 Catherine Gidney, "Dating and Gaiting: The Moral Regulation of Men and Women at Victoria and University Colleges, University of Toronto, 1920–60," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 41, no. 2 (2007): 138–60; Catherine Gidney, *A Long Eclipse: The Liberal Protestant Establishment and the Canadian University, 1920–1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 3–47.
- 9 Marjory MacMurchy, quoted by Margaret Eaton, "Women's Department," *McMaster University Monthly*, January 1917, 174.
- 10 In 1887, Victoria University entered into federation with the University of Toronto, following the passage of the Mowat government's Act of Federation in the Ontario legislature. In 1892, Victoria moved its campus from Cobourg to Toronto. In addition to University College, the original arts college, the University of Toronto's federated colleges included Victoria (1887), Trinity (1904), and St. Michael's (1910). Martin L. Friedland, *The University of Toronto: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 197–284.
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- 13 Daniel Gordon, *Principal's Annual Report*, Queen's University, 1910–11, 28, QUA.
- 14 Caroline E. McNeill, "Report of the Adviser of Women," *Annual Reports*, Queen's University, 1911–12, 31–4; 1912–13, 15; 1915–16, 41 (QUA); "Levana," *Queen's*

- University Journal*, October 26, 1923, 5; “Levana,” *Queen’s University Journal*, February 26, 1924, 5.
- 15 R. Bruce Taylor, *Principal’s Report*, Queen’s University, 1922–23, 11; 1924–25, 8 (QUA); Frederick W. Gibson, *Queen’s University*, vol. 2, 1917–1961: *To Serve and Yet be Free* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1983), 74.
 - 16 Hilda Laird, transcript of interview, Oral History Project: History of Queen’s Women, May 31, 1978, 9, QUA; Sybil MacLachlan, transcript of interview, Oral History Project: History of Queen’s Women, May 15, 1978, 5, QUA; R. Bruce Taylor, *Principal’s Report*, Queen’s University, 1925–26, 4, QUA; Hilda C. Laird, “Report of the Dean of Women,” *Principal’s Report*, Queen’s University, 1925–26, 62–66, QUA; Hilda Ridley, “Queen’s Will Have a Woman’s Residence,” *Saturday Night*, December 1, 1923, 25.
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 - 21 Documents for Use of Commission on Annesley Hall, Records Relating to Women at Victoria University Collection, fonds 2069, Series 1, 1990.146V, box 1, file 8, VUA; Sketch of the History of the Committee of Management of Annesley Hall [March 1931], 23–4, Records Relating to Women at Victoria University Collection, fonds 2069, VUA.
 - 22 “‘Vic’ Women Object to Man-Made Edicts,” *Toronto Globe*, November 29, 1913; Agreement Between the Faculty of Victoria College and the Women Students of the College, November 25, 1914, Records Relating to Women at Victoria University Collection, fonds 2069, Series 3, 1990.134V, Women’s Student Council, VUA; Women’s Literary Society Minutes, February 2, 1921, Records Relating to Women at Victoria University Collection, fonds 2069, Series 3, 2007.04IV TR, VUA.
 - 23 Margaret Addison, Dean’s Report, March 8, 1917, Records Relating to Women at Victoria University Collection, fonds 2069, Series 2, 1990.064V, box 3, file 2, VUA.
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- 32 Margaret Addison to Robert Falconer, February 1, 1919, Office of the President fonds, A67-0007, box 51a, UTA; editorials, *The Varsity*, January 31, 1919, February 24 and 26, 1919; "Hutton Lays Down Laws to Residence Girls," *The Varsity*, February 21, 1919. See also Charles Levi, "Phyllis Grierson, Margaret Ross, and the Queen's Hall Girls: Intergroup Conflict among University College Women, 1910–21," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 12, nos. 1–2 (2000): 73–92. Levi argues that the problems within the residence were accentuated by the university's neglect of women students during the war years.
- 33 Margaret Wrong, Report of University College Women's Union, January 1921, University College Dean of Women fonds, B74-0011, box 1, file 11, UTA. See also Margaret Wrong, Report of University College Women's Union, 1920–1921, University College Dean of Women fonds, B74-0011, box 1, file 10, UTA.
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