Denying Limitations: Women's Seizure of Education in Revolutionary France

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Denying Limitations: Women's Seizure of Education in Revolutionary France

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Denying Limitations: Women's Seizure of Education in Revolutionary France

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Introduction

Today it is common to see women walking around college campuses everywhere in the world. Women have gained equal access to schools and universities, they are recognized as equal citizens, and they have gained the right to vote. To think that women were, at one time, not allowed these basic human rights seems ludicrous. But there was a time when women were oppressed in these and many other ways. They were seen primarily as reproductive vehicles and viewed in terms of child rearing and domestic responsibilities. One such era was that of the French Revolution of 1789, during which all of France was in the process of great political and social upheaval. The Revolution promised much change for the average citizen. It promised abolition of the hierarchical social system France had always known. It promised equality, equal opportunity and equal rights for all. The aforementioned rights were guaranteed to all of mankind, but for many, mankind meant exactly that – men. Somehow women were excluded from this ‘all’.

By today’s standards, it was not an easy life for a woman in the last decade of the eighteenth century in France. Through the lens of a twentieth century perspective, it would appear to be quite a dull existence a girl was to anticipate. They were the future wives and mothers of the sons of the Republic and the only roles they anticipated for themselves in the future were simply those of wife and mother. They were made to adhere to these expectations by their upbringings, by societal expectations of women and by their husbands. Feminism and equal rights at this time were novel ideas entertained by a very small percentage of the population, but were, nonetheless entertained by both women and men alike. This is the era
largely recognized as the commencement of a tangible women's movement, the roots of French feminism.¹

Women during this time frame did not enjoy the same rights as men. Many people in this era believed that women were not even of the same species as men. Instead of being seen as human beings they were treated as women, a distinction that kept them quite distant from their male counterparts. Most revolutionary legislators believed that by their very nature women were unfit to exercise political rights and that if women were called to exercise these rights, neither sex would benefit from an endeavor of this sort;² a philosophy which also applied to female education. But despite the hardships they faced in terms of the limited, yet rigid expectations placed upon them, some women succeeded in ways unimaginable for this period. Women of this period who participated in revolutionary activity were seizing an education. They seized a non-traditional education through their involvement in political clubs and in revolutionary activity such as political protest and marches. For women who were denied education, they took matters into their own hands and seized what they could not otherwise obtain.

There were also many women of this revolutionary period who found means to obtaining equal status to their husbands in certain respects as citizens, or citoyennes, in their own right. They participated in public action (which was relatively uncommon for women of higher class standing, who were seen in the eighteenth century primarily as private and domestic figures) and expended their efforts in revolutionary activity and revolutionary clubs. They did

¹ The topic of French feminism will not be discussed in this paper, though it is a common belief that this period was a monumentally formative one of French feminism.
this in spite of the law, which refused them recognition as active citizens. It is in this and similar respects that some women of this era succeeded in acquiring what I will consider an education in non-traditional ways.

In Revolutionary France, just as the idea of an educated woman, in the sense that she was educated in the same manner as a man (a distinction that encompasses both subjects taught and the ability to obtain an education), was contrary to the norm, so was the idea of women as political actors. As political actors, women were denying their roles as woman, their role of passive, private, dependent individual. No longer were women relying on men to place a vote in accordance with their views, they were now actively struggling for citizenship, a right women were not only refused but of which they were not believed to be worthy.

Women were undoubtedly oppressed in certain aspects and denied equal rights during this period. But, despite (or perhaps because of) the low societal expectations placed on women in the public sense, some women were prominent figures in the revolutionary period. Although they were not thought capable of being politically motivated, certain women did exhibit marked political conscientiousness and took part in political activities, and in so doing, succeeded in procuring for themselves an education. Because the intellectual capacity of men was believed to be superior, the supposed difference in the mental capacity of the female sex left her incapable of displaying the characteristics of a reasoning being. Women were simply considered to be non-reasoning individuals, and this was one of the many beliefs upon which their unfair treatment was based. One of the aspects of citizenship that was denied members of the female

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sex was the right to bear arms. Though they felt it was as naturally their duty to fight for the
patroie as it was for men, by law, they were not allowed this right.

Women's repeated demands for the right to bear arms through the spring and summer of 1792 strongly suggest that at a critical juncture in the revolution, as the nation mobilized for war, an emerging concept and practice of female citizenship was dissolving distinctions between active/passive citizens, male/female citizens and public/private roles – without however, provoking the legal and constitutional revisions that would fix and guarantee their real, if precarious, de facto political standing.3

Because they felt it was a natural duty to defend their homeland, women fought to obtain this right. This is an instance in which it is seen that women were taking an active part in the Revolution, ignoring the limitations they faced. They were, in essence, illegally defending their homeland, and, while it was not accepted by law, women arming themselves became increasingly accepted in the popular sense. The women who had fought beside their husbands at the Bastille and the Champs de Mars, the women who marched to Versailles in an attempt to bring more bread to the capital to sustain their sons and husbands, and who, in so doing, succeeded in returning the king to his proper location – these women were not recognized as full citizens in the constitutional eyes of the country they had so ardently fought to defend. They were denied citizenship and the ability to own property based on beliefs that, merely by their nature, women were lesser beings and were not have mentally capable of exercising the same rights as men.

The types of education which will be treated in this paper include formal education, home schooling, and the ways in which women became educated in their own right, through a means of a seizure of non-traditional education. Participation in revolutionary clubs and
activities such as marches and festivals will be acknowledged as integral aspects of this non-traditional education. It will be shown that women as political actors are to be considered educated, whether or not skills associated with traditional education (i.e. reading, writing, etc.) were comparable to the skills of women who had received formal education such as in a convent or boarding school. Class distinctions will also be considered when possible.

A Brief Look at History, Women and Society

The latter part of the eighteenth century in France was one of great adjustment. It was the age of the Enlightenment, and the end of a period that had shown the continuation of a society divided by birth rank and enamored of tradition, pomp and ritual. The reign of Louis XIV (1643-1715), commonly known as the Sun King, was one of great expenditure and affluence. It was during this Louis' reign that the palace at Versailles was constructed. He lived at great expense, and at the expense of the French people, or more specifically, largely at the expense of the working class, later known as the sans-culottes. It was this part of French society that was the most burdened by taxes, not the upper classes who would have been more able to afford it. And the affluence of the nobility and the burden suffered by the people are reasons cited as ones that sparked the Revolution in France at this time.

Later in the succession of French kings came Louis XV. During the reign of Louis XV (1715-1774), a prominent aspect of court life was that of the salon. The year 1774 commenced the reign of Louis XVI, who was king during the revolution, though far removed from the

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3 Melzer and Rabine 89.
4 This class was known as such because they wore pants, as opposed to the breeches popular later in the eighteenth century, denoting a lower social stature.
capital at the onset: he and his wife, an Austrian woman named Marie-Antoinette (who was as
detested by the people as Louis was believed incompetent) lived in the grand palace of
Versailles at the outbreak of revolution.

During the eighteenth century, women were accepted as members of the court. Earlier
in the eighteenth century, during the Enlightenment, the common intellectual arena of the salon
was one into which, by and large, women were accepted as intellectual equals. This is not to
make the assumption that all men were particularly fond of women’s presence in the salons, but
they were accepted therein, and this was a setting in which, together, men and women
conversed about topics of an intellectual nature. In fact, women were often founders of such
salons.

The implications of the salons for women’s education are clear. For a woman of the
Enlightenment, a salon was an accepted way for women to express their knowledge and gain an
understanding of new information with men and other women of letters. The salons of the
Enlightenment differed from their predecessors, in that the salons of a century earlier had been
more frivolous in nature, and promoted a “leisure ideal,”6 whereas “the salonières of the
Enlightenment must be viewed as intelligent, self-educated, and educating women who
reshaped the social forms of their day to their own social, intellectual, and educational needs.”7

For Madame Marie-Thérèse Geoffrin “Creating a salon was [Geoffrin’s] way of educating
herself... her social gatherings provided a forum for new ideas and an opportunity to establish

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7 Ibid. 332-333
new intellectual contacts." The issue of the appropriateness of women as founders and participants of salon culture was one that had both opponents and proponents. Both Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire (whose lover Emilie du Châtelet was an educated and outwardly intellectual woman) were opposed to women of this group. Rousseau stated, "Every woman at Paris gathers in her apartment a harem of men more womanish than she," and Voltaire proclaims of du Châtelet "I frequently wish she were less learned and her mind less sharp." However, education in salons was limited to a few elite women of upper class standing. As Landes states, "The salon... contributed to the consolidation of the elite by introducing new members into its folds. Even so, it remained a highly restricted affair. One participated by invitation, and to attend a salon was to know and be known by those who counted in society." This was not a form of education that was extended to the general masses, but instead a very limited few. For women of the salons it was necessary to be socially upstanding in order to become educated.

Before the revolution, in this societal context, women had a predetermined and well-defined image to which they were largely made to adhere, although they were not as oppressed as it seems at first glimpse. "[During the eighteenth century] the majority... seemed to agree... on at least this one point: a woman's place was in the home, and her only proper occupations were those of wife and mother." The role of women of this period was one that revolved around what was believed to be their natural domain: the domestic sphere. But a part of

9 Ibid.
10 Ibid. 648-649.
women's work that is not normally considered or recognized is that of wage earner. In theory, it was commonly held that a woman should have been able to stay home in order to fulfill her duties as a domestic engineer and attentive mother to her children, but this aspect of a woman's role was reserved for women of the upper class. Only husbands of the upper classes earned enough money to allow their wives to fulfill this role. "...[Only] among the upper classes did marriage provide a woman with the relative luxury of having nothing more to do than to survey the management of her home and children, or to abandon herself to her own amusement."13 On the other hand, the reality of the life of working-class women, or women of the lower classes, included the roles of wife and mother as well as wage earner. "In all other orders of society, a married woman was expected not only to keep house and raise her children, but to contribute financially to the maintenance of the family as well. A lower class woman's wage-earning ability formed a vital part of the family economy."14

In the article, 'Women in Revolution,' Olwen Hufton acquaints the reader with life of the French working-class woman in the latter part of the eighteenth century, and stresses the importance of women in the family's financial well being. "The importance of the mother within the family economy was immense; her death or incapacity could cause a family to cross the narrow but extremely meaningful barrier between poverty and destitution."15 It's obvious that the role of female as co-breadwinner was vital, yet this is not as widely discussed or widely known a fact. Women's role of wage earner in the lower classes was never as clearly understood

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13 Ibid.
14 Ibid. 68.
as her role in the care of the home and children. A logical reason for this is that, as with education or political involvement, it was 'unnatural' for a woman to help financially support her family. It is also argued that in a patriarchal society, such as in France, it was neither feminine for a woman to work nor masculine for a man to be unable for a man to completely provide for his family. And while the men of the upper classes were able to provide for their families while their wives cared for the children at home, refraining from work outside the home, the women of the lower classes took jobs and were essential in maintaining the financial well-being of their families.

Whatever the social class, however, the common opinion during the eighteenth century was that, because women and men were naturally different from one another, each should be responsible for different duties and hold different positions in society. Likewise, the expectations of each should differ in the home. But this was more than an opinion; it was a truth that, to the individual living in France during the eighteenth century, was unquestionable. The origins of these beliefs were old and well-established, based in writings and beliefs of the Christian faith, according to which, “In the Beginning, God created Man. It was only later that he created Woman, both from and for the Man, to be his companion and aid.”\(^{16}\) And in a period in French history when the Church was so closely tied to the State, there was little possibility of popular belief not reflecting the beliefs of the Church. Other origins were based in the writings of philosophers such as Aristotle, whose idea of the ‘infertile male,’ or woman as an imperfect version of man, was repeatedly used during the eighteenth century.\(^{17}\) “Women and men were not created for the same purpose. Woman was created to bear man’s children;
man’s destiny was something else entirely... Each sex had been assigned its unique and immutable destiny at the dawn of existence. Women were created by God Himself (as God was most certainly believed to be male), to be subordinate and obedient to man, and thus following, to survey the upkeep of his house.

A pertinent question that can be raised of women in this era is whether the women were denying their gender in participating in revolutionary politics, as many opponents to women's political involvement at this time believed. In other words, were women simply acting like men, forgetting for a time that they were women? Some citizens would respond positively to this question, as a woman acting in public was surely imitating her male counterparts and forgetting her sex and all that was expected of her as a woman. A member of the Paris Commune, Pierre-Gaspard Chaumette begs the question,

Since when is it permitted to give up one’s sex? Since when is it decent to see women abandoning the pious cares of their households, the cribs of their children, to come to public places...? Is it to men that nature confided domestic cares? Has she given us breasts to feed our children?

This argument is simply an extension, or another facet of the age-old nature debate, entailing what exactly a woman was fit to do, beyond her responsibilities in the domestic sphere. In addition to seeing women as naturally unfit for political involvement, many felt that, not only might they be denying their sex and acting as men, but if they had responsibilities outside the home, they would be denying their natural roles of mother and wife. André Amar, a Convention representative of the Committee of General Security, felt that if women were allowed to enter into the political realm:

17 Ibid. 3.
18 Ibid. 4.
...they would be obliged to sacrifice the more important cares to which
nature calls them. The private functions for which women are destined
by their very nature are related to the general order of society; this social
order results from the differences between man and woman. Each sex is
called to the kind of occupation which is fitted for it; its action is
circumscribed within this circle which it cannot break through, because
nature, which has imposed these limits on man, commands imperiously
and receives no law.20

The concept of nature and natural gender roles was thus employed frequently during this era, as
well as during both the periods preceding and proceeding it. Women were thoroughly
saturated by their sex by nature, unlike men, and because of this, they were completely ruled by
it. There was no arguing that women were ruled by their sex because it was an integral part of
their biological make-up and therefore, they should act accordingly, or as their gender
characteristics deemed appropriate.

As stated by Joan Wallach Scott, the goals of the Revolution were primarily liberty,
sovereignty, moral choice informed by reason and active involvement in the formation of just
laws.21 It was plain that at this time, the goals of the Revolution were parallel to characteristics
attributed to men, not women. This can be seen from the following list of male and female
gender attributes that display the characteristic of men and women, and how they were believed
to differ:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Passive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberty</td>
<td>Duty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Sovereignty</td>
<td>Dependency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason</td>
<td>Modesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech</td>
<td>Silence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20 Ibid.
21 Melzer and Rabine 105.
Education  Maternal Nurture
Male     Female

As this list illustrates, the goals of the revolution represented for men all that was believed to be in their nature. Because of beliefs such as this, women who participated in the political realm must be denying their own nature and gender and embracing the male gender. It was not natural for women to be involved in political matters because theirs was the private, silent and dependent sex.

The "Education of Girls"

By the outbreak of Revolution in 1789, the intellectual status of women was much in debate and had led to a lively discussion of women should be educated. There are records accounting for the existence of girl's schools dating back to early in the seventeenth century, schools that continued to exist into the revolutionary era in France. However, the acceptance level of knowledgeable women had fallen, even if the number of schools accepting female pupils had not, despite that there were more girls attending school than ever before, and that the literacy rate had risen considerably during the latter part of the eighteenth century. If women had been accepted grudgingly into the intellectual atmosphere of salon culture of the early eighteenth century they were now, due to a series of developments, (including the heightened image of and importance placed upon the role of Republican housewives and mothers) seen more as 'traditional' housewives. They were accepted as - and even encouraged to remain - ignorant, uneducated individuals whose focus was home life.

22 Scott 105.
The quality of women’s education in the eighteenth century can be justly labeled as pitifully inadequate. H. C. Barnard states in *Education and the French Revolution*, in respect to both girl’s and boy’s elementary schools that, “Quite apart from the statistics, it is clear that the general standards of teaching, the character and qualifications of the lay teachers... left much to be desired.” Parishes founded many of these charity schools (where those unable to afford tuition were able to send their children), though schools also existed that were founded by religious orders or sponsored privately, by individuals. However, despite its inadequacy, education for a young girl, even at the elementary level, was considered a luxury. Of the girls fortunate enough to obtain an education, many were of the nobility and usually came from wealthy families, and a girl’s education was short-lived, as girls generally did not stay in school for more than a period of two years.

Class distinction is a very prominent aspect of what kind of school a girl attended. Girls of well-to-do families generally received an education in one of two places: in the home, or in a convent. If the chosen option was being taught in the home, girls were taught their lessons by friends of the family or by family members themselves. Otherwise, the choice was gaining a formal education, such as in a convent. In these institutions, students had the choice of either living in the convent, or commuting to and from the school daily, and the ages of students generally ranged from ten to eighteen years of age. The girls who stayed in the

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26 Lec 81.
27 Duby and Perrot 123.
28 It has proven to be difficult to separate the different types of education and what class attended what school, etc. for this project, as the distinctions differ with each source.
29 Barnard 9.
convent were from the wealthier families, and the students who left at the end of the day were
typically from bourgeois families. Boarding schools were similar to the convent schools in the
sense that there was a tuition fee, which was only affordable to wealthier families, and that
students either lived at the school or commuted. The main difference between convents and
boarding schools was the educational emphasis. In convent schools, understandably, the
emphasis was religion, and the focus was more on obedience to the monastic rule than on
education. In the non-religious private schools, the atmosphere was closer to family life. Non-
religious boarding schools offered an alternative for families who wished to send their daughters
away to be educated, but were still elitist enough that only wealthy families could afford them.

For the other students, or those whose families could afford neither tuition to these
schools, nor the absence of the child, there were public schools.30 Elementary schools were one
form of public education and these were either paying or nonpaying.31 Even the schools that
charged a fee were far more affordable than convent or boarding schools.32 There were also free
schools that were meant to service girls of families that could not afford tuition, though in these
schools there were also girls whose families could afford to pay a fee.33

A century earlier, girls of the lower classes also had opportunities to become educated,
generally through the church. During the seventeenth century, Catholic teaching institutions
and congregations arose, with 325 such institutions opened by the order of the Ursuline sisters
alone.34 In these institutions, some girls were not required to pay tuition,35 those girls being of

31 Ibid. 117.
32 Ibid. 118.
33 Ibid. 120.
34 Lee 79.
the lower classes whose families were not able to afford the tuition fees. In addition to the poor quality of the education received in all institutions accepting female pupils, by the end of the century most of these congregations (especially convent schools) had switched their emphasis to those of official convent orders, in which “nuns took their vows and where intellectual prowess took a back seat to piety.”36 In the congregation schools, even prior to the switch in emphasis, the subjects were predominately religious and students commonly were not taught to write.

During the latter part of the seventeenth century, in 1688, individuals began to look at the question of a girl’s education in a more practical manner than they had before, which resulted in a small number of influential events. The first of these was the publication of Claude Fleury’s “Traité sur le choix et la méthode des études” in 1685.37 In the thirty-sixth chapter of this work, Fleury dealt with “women’s studies,” in which he stated that women should be better educated and proposed a curriculum consisting of religion, reading, writing, home economics, and law, among other things. Following this was the publication of Fénélon’s *Education of Girls* in 1687.38 In *Education of Girls*, Fénélon proposed a system of education for girls that was quite revolutionary for his time. He proposed that, because girls would someday marry, they should be taught the same things that men were taught, in this respect becoming a more efficient wife, housekeeper and mother.39 This was a common premise in terms of theory associated with girls and education. Girls did not warrant an education simply for education’s

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35 Ibid. 79.
36 Ibid.
37 Duby and Perrot 106.
38 Lee 80, and Duby and Perrot 107.
39 Lee 80.
sake, but would be more useful to her husband later in life, if she were educated. The underlying purpose to all enrichment for girls at this time was to benefit men somehow.40

The last of these influential occurrences was the founding of Madame de Maintenon’s school for girls in 1686.41 The school founded by Madame de Maintenon emphasized the value of work and duty for noblewomen, who would otherwise have remained uneducated.42 Here girls studied reading, writing, counting, grammar, catechism, the Bible, French, music, history, geography and mythology.43 As simplistic and unchallenging as this system may seem by today’s standards, for its day it was quite progressive.

With the increased amount of schools, by the eighteenth century, parents were forced into a decision. At this point there existed a debate between home education and formal education: which was more suitable for girls?44 In the convent, or boarding schools, the emphasis in religion varied; however, aside from the emphasis on religious subjects, there was a general stress on the social aspects of a girl’s future.45 In some convents, especially those in Paris, for example, there was a marked emphasis on aspects of social orientation. Emphasis and lifestyle was much different for those educated in the home, which was common for a girl of bourgeois standing. In the home the stress was placed more on the arts, and the girl had more contact with men and generally had more say in the eventual choice of a husband.

40 This aspect will be seen again later in the philosophy of Rousseau, as it relates to girls and education.
41 Lec 80, and Duby and Perrot 107. Madame de Maintenon was the mistress-turned-wife of Louis XIV.
42 Hunt, et al.588.
43 Lec 81.
44 This was a debate pondered only by those of the upper classes. As we have seen, for the lower classes, home schooling was not an option.
45 Lec 87.
But this debate was short-lived. In the second half of the eighteenth century, families were becoming closer and it had become more fashionable for girls to receive their education in the home, and again, this trend was one seen in the middle to upper classes.⁴⁶ For children of the lower class in Paris, some parishes established the petites écoles, which were free to children of the very lowest class but, to which the children of the petite bourgeoisie were made to pay a small fee⁴⁷. Of these schools, some were male-only, some co-educational, and some female-only. Still other parishes founded primary schools called écoles de charité. These écoles were entirely free to students and some accepted girl students⁴⁸. Of what little education received by girls in the lower class, these girls received no education in boarding schools.⁴⁹

Not only did female children not have equal access to a quality education, nor was the education they received equivalent to a boy’s education, but there were also those who refuted the idea that girls should receive the same type of education. One such individual was the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau who had a very clear opinion on the issue of education of girls as well as of the role of women. Rousseau wrote his treatise on education, *Emile*, well before the Revolution in 1762, and though it was quite revolutionary for its time, he won much support for this work. In *Emile*, Rousseau expresses very clear opinions on the nature and characteristics of women. As he states in the beginning of Book Fifth of *Emile*, as he begins his description of the perfect mate for Emile, “Sophie ought to be a woman, as Emile is a man – that is, she should have whatever is befitting the constitution of her species and of her

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⁴⁶ Lee 91.
⁴⁷ Ibid. 93.
⁴⁸ Ibid.
⁴⁹ Ibid 94.
sex, in order to fill her place in the physical and moral world.\textsuperscript{50} He based his arguments, as did many at this time, in his belief that women were, by their very nature, inferior to men (though never clearly stated, this is certainly implied), and for Rousseau the distinctions between men and women are extremely clear. He states, “In the union of the sexes each contributes equally toward the common end, but not in the same way. Hence arises the first assignable difference among their moral relations. One must be active and strong, the other passive and weak. One must have power and will, while it suffices that the other have little power of resistance.”\textsuperscript{51} He believed that women were dependent upon man for their entire existence, and her first duty must be to please him.\textsuperscript{52}

In \emph{Emile}, Rousseau goes into depth about the general educational system of the time and ends up with a rigorous program for male children to the age of twenty that is distinctly his own. In this treatise he stated not that a woman did not deserve to be educated, but that due to the difference in the mental composition of women and men, men possessed the mental composition more favorable in retaining and appreciating that which he learned. This opinion is reflected in the following passage from \emph{Emile}:

\begin{quote}
But I would a hundred times prefer a simple girl, rudely brought up, to a girl of learning and wit who should come to establish in my house a literary tribunal of which she should make herself president. A woman of wit is the scourge of her husband, her children, her friends, her servants, of everybody. In the sublime elevation of her fine genius she disdains all the duties of woman, and always begins by making a man of herself.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{50} Rousseau’s \textit{Emile or Treatise on Education}, (New York: D. Appleton, 1914) 259.
\textsuperscript{51} Bell 263.
\textsuperscript{52} Proctor 6.
\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Emile} 65.
While the work *Emile* is seen as a treatise whose influence reaches far beyond the specific time frame in which it was written – from the Enlightenment, well into the revolutionary period and beyond – it is also telling of the attitude of some toward the women of the salon. Rousseau’s guidelines for a woman’s existence and behavior were quite rigid. There were those behaviors that fit into a woman’s role and those that clearly did not. And clearly he was not a proponent of extensive education for women, nor did he care for the women of the salons. It seems that Rousseau supported a kind of ‘subsistence’ education for women: an education that would teach girls what they would need to know in the future to care for their husbands and families. Perhaps he would even have support girls having some exposure to subjects for which she might be responsible to teach to her children later, but none of the more rigorous subjects aimed at boys, such as math or sciences. It is in the fifth book of *Emile*, called ‘The Education of Woman,’ that Rousseau most clearly relates his feelings regarding women’s education. It was his belief that men and women were different and therefore, the course the lives of each should take, logically following, should differ as well. Rousseau believed that women are destined to be passive and private while men are predetermined for action and public life. While Rousseau may see no shame in woman as a passive being, it is plain to see from a twentieth century perspective how limited and unjust this view is.

The main point of Rousseau’s argument is that men and women are different, and that neither should aspire to the roles of the other. He believes that because of this difference they should each live and be educated differently. Women should not try to be men, by which he means they should not attempt to become politically active thereby denying their sexual predetermination. Women’s education, by the same token, should not be the same as a man's.
Thus, the whole education of women should be relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honored by them, to educate them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to console them, and to make life agreeable and sweet to them – these are the duties of women at all times, and what should be them from infancy. He feels that daughters, and women should always be submissive, but this is not meant to be a form of torture, or even oppression in the eyes of Rousseau: "In order to render a young woman docile, it is not necessary to make her unhappy; to render her modest, it is not necessary to brutalize her." In short, Rousseau, in the fifth book: The Education of Woman, concerns himself with attempting to keep intact what he sees as the natural order of things. He works to educate others with the best possible relations between women, their roles and education.

An interesting aspect of the response to Rousseau’s philosophy was that, despite the oppressive stance he took on the existence and roles of women, there were some women who actually embraced his philosophy. Two examples, both of whom were upstanding, educated women and politically active in the Revolution, are Madame Roland and Madame de Staël. An explanation for their support of Rousseau, a man who would deny any woman the possibility and capability of political action and receiving an adequate education, may be that “Rousseau’s vision... validated their desire for love and offered a new model of conjugal happiness.”

Rousseau validated their desire to be loved, to be more than a domestic servant. He gave them

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54 Emile 263. From the perspective of a woman born in the last quarter of the twentieth century, it would be easy to write off this philosophy as derogatory toward women, and to completely disagree with Rousseau as a rambling philosophe whose ideas are antiquated, but it’s difficult to dismiss these ideas when he so glorifies and makes beautiful the occupation of motherhood.

55 Emile 271.

the right to feel.\textsuperscript{57} Even the women of the revolutionary clubs found truth in the writings of Rousseau—"[Club members] began by rendering respectful homage to the immortal principles of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, which, they stressed, must always govern the conduct of a good wife and mother."\textsuperscript{58}

**Early Feminist Views on Women’s Education and Women’s Rights**

In this period there were individuals who could be labeled as feminists, and who displayed marked interest in education and in the education of women. Surprising as it may seem, when speaking in terms of a historical period in which women were granted so few rights by the men who made the laws, some of these feminists were men. One of these outstanding men was Louis Philipon de la Madelaine. In his views on education, Philipon cites the popular example of Sparta, a commonly cited example in the debate surrounding education for girls, a society that believed that, in order to produce strong and healthy children, mothers must be women of good physique.\textsuperscript{59} The Spartans also believed that for female children, bodily exercise, though not so strenuous, is still as important as it is for male children, but that intellectual education for females is of little importance.\textsuperscript{60} Though Philipon’s opinion does not comply with what we would see by today’s standards as a feminist perspective and still seems slightly oppressive to women, he was in favor of a type of education for women, which was a somewhat rare opinion, especially with men of prominent standing.

\textsuperscript{57} Another work by Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, had much influence on the revolutionaries, but will not be discussed herein.
\textsuperscript{58} Proctor 62.
\textsuperscript{59} Barnard 46 – 47.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid. 47.
Another of these prominent public figures, and another man, was Marquis de
Condorcet, a French aristocrat, a liberal, an *encyclopédiste*, an advocate of a system of national
education, and all around humanist. Otherwise known as Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicolas Caritat,
he was something of a unique case in the history of the Revolution. The stature of his family
no doubt had something to do with the respect he was allowed (considering some of the causes
he chose not only to support, but also to publicly advocate). Condorcet was a man whose
interests encompassed many genres of eighteenth century society. His interests included
liberalism in political, intellectual, social, religious and economic terms; feminism; and popular
education.\(^{61}\) Condorcet was one of the first to see the necessity of enlightening the masses and
declared,

> One must not believe that the wealthy classes could continue for long to
> be enlightened if the masses were condemned to eternal stupidity. It is
> when it spreads, and not when it contracts, that enlightenment becomes
> really effective. The more that enlightenment is restricted to a few the
> greater is the danger that error will tarnish its brightness.\(^{62}\)

Unlike most at this time, Condorcet was an advocate of egalitarianism. In his ‘Report
on Education’ delivered to the Legislative Assembly in April 1992,\(^{63}\) Condorcet stressed the
need for educational reform. He begins his report with the statement, “To offer *all* individuals
of the human race...”\(^{64}\) (my emphasis) which is followed by a list of that which he believes

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\(^{61}\) Salwyn J. Schapiro, *Condorcet and the Rise of Liberalism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company,
1934) 129.

\(^{62}\) Schapiro 201.


\(^{64}\) Simon 29.
should be “the primary aim of education; and from this point of view it is a task of probity for the government.”\textsuperscript{65} He later states,

We have felt that in this plan of general organization our prime care should be to render education on the one hand, as universal, on the other as complete as circumstances permit; that the education that it is possible to extend to all should be given to all equally; but not to refuse higher education to any part of the citizens because it is impossible to share it with the total population; to establish the one because it is useful to those who receive it, and the other because it is useful even to those who do not receive it.\textsuperscript{66}

If we were to be considering a quote of this sort from someone like Rousseau, we could be certain that he was applying this mentality to one-half of the population – the male half. Condorcet, on the other hand, presents a unique situation in that he is actually considering the population as a whole, both men and women. Condorcet goes further to deem himself a feminist in that he felt education to be a natural right and hence, a right that was to be applied to women as well as men.\textsuperscript{67}

Equally uncommon for this era, he saw women as citizens and believed they needed to be educated in order to know their rights and perform their duties.\textsuperscript{68} He renounced the idea of a free constitution on the basis of women’s exclusion from it. Urging that women gain the right of citizenship he asks, “…have [the legislators and philosophes] not all violated the principle of the equality of rights in tranquilly depriving one-half the human race of the right of taking part in the formation of laws by the exclusion of women from the rights of

\textsuperscript{65} Simon 29.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid. 30.
\textsuperscript{67} Schapiro 201.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
condorcet takes issue with the reasoning behind women’s exclusion, as he believes the reasoning is false and contrived, and states, “The existence of one injustice can never be accepted as a reason for committing another.” Some of the arguments in favor of women’s exclusion include women being non-reasoning beings, and that if women were granted political rights, they would be unable to appropriately exercise these rights. Condorcet acknowledges that men and women are ruled by different reason, but felt that it was education, not nature, that perpetuated the differences in the sexes, and hence, in the amount of knowledge they possess. He also makes light of these arguments by maintaining that there were men, as equally unknowable as women, who were granted citizenship, and that this reasoning was unacceptable: “If reasons such as [lack of experience] are to be admitted against women, it will become necessary to deprive of the rights of citizenship that portion of the people who, devoted to constant labour, can neither acquire knowledge nor exercise reason; and thus, little by little, only those persons would be permitted to be citizens who had completed a course of legal study.”

Another figure, Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel, exhibited similar beliefs. He felt that within the new constitution an entire half of the population was unjustly being ignored and was in favor of women’s citizenship and access to education. He felt that men and women should be educated in much the same manner until age twelve, at which time each sex would become more specially oriented to the natural expectations of each.

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69 Mary Cohart, *Unsung Champions of Women* (Albequerque: University of New Mexico, 1975) 220.
70 Ibid. 223.
71 Ibid. 222-223.
72 Landes 128.
Later in the Revolution, with the emergence of women’s political clubs, there was a proponent of another kind, a journalist referred to as Carra, whose “praise may have helped inspire the spread of new clubs early in 1791.” Carra vocally supported women’s societies and pointed out women’s dual role as public and domestic figures: “If they exist partly for the domestic consolation and enjoyment of men, they also exist in part for the progress and advancement of virtue and social prosperity.” In so saying, Carra points to the fact that women must perform a double, and contradicting role: their existence was always seen in terms of how it could benefit men and the Republic, yet when they tried to better themselves (which could be viewed as benefiting the sons of the Republic) they were subject to attack for denying their predetermined roles.

Non-Traditional Forms of Education, or Women’s Seizure of Education

It has become apparent that prior to the Revolution, women had some opportunity to obtain an education, although it was generally inadequate and far below the level of male education. They were admitted to relatively few schools and for the women of the lower classes, the opportunities for education were even fewer. But they were human beings, and as human beings, just as men of the era, they desired knowledge. Perhaps they wanted to participate in the Revolution and help their sons and husbands further the revolutionary cause, perhaps they wished to be educated for the sake of educating their sons, or perhaps they wished to be involved for purely selfish reasons. For these and other reasons, women aspired to be

74 Ragan and Williams 20.
educated, and they consciously and unconsciously devised ways in which to obtain this education. Women during this era set aside the traditional and accustomed roles and came into their own element. They became revolutionaries, and "[they] were in fact far removed from... dainty femininity... and all the perfumes of Arabia would not sweeten hands steeped to the elbows in *ci-devant* blood."75 They chose to educate themselves in ways that may not have been seen as education, and these ways, or more specifically these actions and behaviors, were as looked down upon by some as was a formal education. But if we consider the definition of education,

1: the act or process of educating or of being educated: as a obs : the act or process of rearing or bringing up (as a child or animal) or developing physically from childhood or of being reared, brought up or developed in this way b : the act or process of providing with knowledge, skill, competence or usu. desirable qualities of behavior or character76

we will see that women involved in the different arenas of the Revolution were, in fact, educated and that their seizure of this education was in spite of what was expected of them, and in spite of opposition from prominent individuals such as Rousseau and the majority of men in the national legislature. The education they received was an *experiential* education, which directly corresponds to the above definition. They learned by doing, or through a learning process and an astonishing factor of this era was that there is no tangible or foreseeable catalyst for behavior of this sort. It leaves one asking just exactly why women mobilized as they did in this manner at this particular period of time. Why would women participate when they were legally denied citizenship? Why would women defend a country in which they had very few

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76 Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary. (Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 1985) 323.
political rights? Perhaps these are questions that cannot be answered, or more specifically, that cannot be answered in this work, but we shall see.

Women of the lower classes seized the education they were denied through political activism and demonstration in the era of the French Revolution, and women of the upper classes seized a similar education through involvement in both clubs and public demonstrations. Because they were not as readily able to obtain a formal education as were men, they seized this education in the sense that they were worked and struggled to achieve it. It was not given to them nor were they taught in the traditional sense. They were forced to be innovative and devise their own methods for obtaining the results, both political and personal, they desired. They were forced to become aware of that which was of importance to them and find means to making those things a reality, such as with the October Days and petitions written, composed and presented by members of political clubs. Although political involvement of this sort is not generally seen as a form of education, for these women it was exactly that.

The days of October 4-5, 1789 offer an example of women’s seizure of experiential learning through political activism. It was during this two-day period that thousands of women and some hundreds of men mobilized and marched to the king’s palace at Versailles. Their motivation for the march is believed to have been due largely to a shortage of grain in the capital. The crowds began to gather in various neighborhoods, such as those of Saint Antoine and Les Halles. They went first to the Hôtel de Ville and then on to Versailles. The number of women and men in the crowd ranges from source to source, from merely hundreds of marchers to approximately 10,000. When they had arrived at the palace, a detachment of armed women demanded an interview of the king, while another detachment took over the national
legislature. The women were victorious in their endeavor, as the king and his family promised the presence of more grain in Paris, and returned with the women to the city.

This event can be seen as an example of women educating themselves. It can be assumed that the catalyst for this event was mere hunger. There was a shortage of grain in the capital due to a number of factors, and Parisians were paying absurd prices for loaves of bread. But that this event was an educational event or the result of an increased level of education is displayed in the women's increased level of political awareness. There must have been other ways for the women to respond to this crisis, but the women chose to go directly to the king. And they succeeded in the endeavor: after refusing the king's offer of money, they were promised more grain, and later the return of the king to the capital. The women could simply have exhibited violence (and of course there was some bloodshed) or rioted, but instead they demanded the king personally hear their concerns. There was a level of both political organization and awareness these women portrayed that was outside the norm. It was in participating in this experience that the women educated themselves. And not only did they march the near twenty miles from the capital to Versailles, but many did this spontaneously and without nourishment in their stomachs.

While this can be seen as a manner of non-traditional education, one cannot ignore that there is some dispute as to the level of political awareness of the women. In instances such as the October days, we can certainly assume that there were some women in that immense crowd who displayed political interests. "The women realized, it seems, albeit in a somewhat

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Melzer and Rabine 83-84.
simplistic way, that political intervention was the means to practical reform." The majority of women who participated in the march, however, did so to obtain a promise from the king that more grain would be present in the capital. "[Hunger] was undeniably a factor in the women’s actions. Some of them arrived at Versailles as living embodiments of the famine that afflicted Paris... The women left [Paris]... accompanied by resounding cries of 'Bread and to Versailles!" Later testimony on the subject of the October Days by Jean-Joseph Mounier, deputy from Grenoble "reveals that the only topic of discussion [during a meeting of a group of women marchers and deputies of the court] was the problem of the shortage of staples in Paris."

Therefore, it is apparent that the majority of women marched the many miles to Versailles not for selfish reasons or reasons based in feminist rhetoric, but to sustain their families. However, "A special connection between women and subsistence does exist, based on women’s social function of nurturer, but it must not blind us," and Roessler argues that women of this group "displayed strong political overtones from the outset." And although the women may have cried 'Bread and to Versailles,' they were also heard to have said, "'Bread, but not at the price of liberty.'"

While many of the women were not formally educated to begin with, as most were common working women, during those two days in October, they most certainly gained an education from their experience. They returned to Paris from Versailles with the understanding

79 Ibid. 16.
80 Roessler 29.
82 Roessler 9.
83 Applewhite and Levy 65.
that by actually doing something of this caliber, to protest, to stand up for their rights as a person, as a human being, they could change things. And women continued to play a strong role in the revolution—"The subsistence crisis mobilized them, but the expressions of their anger continued to take on a political resonance."³⁸⁴

During the French Revolution, women mobilized as individuals, as individuals in massive crowds of both men and women, and as masses of women. In her essay, 'Political Practice during the French Revolution,' Dominique Godineau details some of the events in which women were the majority of participants, as well as classifying what types of actions women took during the revolution, and which types of women participated. She cites the examples of militant and political action as forms of the citizenship women were denied, a premise that is somewhat echoed in the works of Applewhite and Levy, who also contend that revolutionary women were citizens in their own right and obtained citizenship through militant activity. The examples detailed in Godineau's piece include such militant events as that of the October Days and the insurrections in Year III, as well as more subdued political actions such as women in clubs voting together (women were not granted the right to vote as this was a privilege reserved for citizens) and petitioning. Women of this period displayed insight and skill in areas such as protest and political unity,³⁸⁵ despite that they had little hands-on experience in many of these areas, and that they were not able to become a formally organized group by law.

³⁸⁴ Applewhite and Levy 65.
³⁸⁵ Other examples of this political unity that must be acknowledged are the women's cabiers de doléances, and women's signing of and presenting petitions to the Convention. While neither of these instances will be discussed in this work, their importance and relevance to my argument of political activism as a form of non-traditional education cannot be ignored.
Another noteworthy aspect of women’s involvement in revolutionary activities was the audacity with which these women undermined the law. They were not recognized as citizens, and as non-citizens, they did not have the right to bear arms. Yet at the insurrection of Prairial, Year III, it was the women who sounded the call to bear arms and roused the men and dragged them into the Convention, where the first assault was mounted. Women demanded the right to vote, to be acknowledged as men’s equal, to be acknowledged as citizens. Women had to be innovative, since they did not have the convenience of the assembly to raise their voices—“Since they could not make themselves fully heard in section assemblies, [the women] formed the habit of speaking out in the markets, on bread lines, in the street, in groups and in front of the Convention.” They had turned from passive women into active citoyennes, from primarily private beings into public ones, just as France in spring 1789, from a nation earlier ignorant of political life, had transformed into a nation passionate about it.

In the article ‘Women and Militant Citizenship in Revolutionary Paris’, Levy and Applewhite delve into another aspect of women as actors in the French Revolution. The article deals with women’s citizenship in Revolutionary Paris. It does not treat the topic so much in terms of women being granted citizenship, for they were not, but instead it argues women seized citizenship through militancy. The authors state, “the de facto participation of women in the political through all these activities was what we are calling their practice of citizenship.” The authors cite militant actions as a form of citizenship, which can also be used to support the

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86 Applewhite and Levy 68.
87 Applewhite and Levy 71.
89 Rabine and Melzer, 81.
theory of action, or involvement as a form of education. Women defied the norm and behaved as they believed they were entitled to behave as human beings.

Levy and Applewhite cite numerous examples of women using force as a means of citizenship. This experience and many other types of experience, such as political involvement and protest, can be seen as a seizure of education. No longer were women sitting idly by, watching their brothers become educated and leading public lives. They seized the uncertainty and ambiguity of the French Revolution and made the best of the situation for themselves. The fact that women were so prominently active in the revolution is a striking one. They were believed to be soft and sweet, the gentle sex. But women are remembered as being as militant as their husbands in this period.

Individual women also took great strides toward empowering and liberating women as well as attempting to shatter the commonly held beliefs about them, both in action and in writing. One such woman was Olympe de Gouges, a woman wholly in favor of women’s equal rights, and the woman credited with establishing the first women’s society during the revolution. The author of the ‘Déclaration des Droits de la Femme et de la Citoyenne’ (1791) she is seen as an outstanding feminist figure of the Revolutionary period. This pamphlet was written in response to the ‘Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen,’ (1789) in which the author declares, “all men are born and remain free it,” reserving equality for all men. De Gouges took offense to this declaration because of its limitation: a document declaring the rights of man, not in the sense of humankind – simply the rights of men. In her response De Gouges was not only continuing to educate herself, but others as well. Her declaration was

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90 Landes 124.
published in the form of a pamphlet, and though de Gouges did not prove to be a popular figure nor did her pamphlets make much of an impact at the time they were distributed, at least one of her pamphlets has proven noteworthy.

A self-educated woman, de Gouges also tackled the issue of women’s education and cited this as a principle reason for the lack of opportunities for women later in life. She saw the lack of educational options for women as the starting point for women’s oppression and her declaration called for a raising of women’s social stature. She demanded women be equal to men and exercise the same rights, the most pertinent of these being the right to citizenship and education. She believed that women were the victims of oppression and injustice, and encouraged women to take action and change their attitudes. She wanted women to empower themselves and rise above the chains in which society kept them. In short, she called for women to mobilize and become educated.

Another woman who responded to “La Déclaration des Droits de L’Homme et du Citoyen” was an Englishwoman, Mary Wollstonecraft. Touted as one the foremost feminists of her time, Wollstonecraft was enraged by the exclusion of women by the Assembly, and found it unacceptable that men “consider[ed] the creatures of the female sex as women rather than as human beings.” Wollstonecraft was adamantly in favor of women’s rights as well as educational and employment opportunities. To liberate women she would grant both full and equal education as well as broader access to new areas of employment. Often returning to the issue of women’s education she argues that “it is the gift of improvable reason that distinguishes

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91 Miles 152.
92 Roessler 64-65.
man from the animal and that, as human beings, women must be allowed to cultivate their minds," and also nullifies the notion that men and women maintain different and distinct virtues.⁹⁴

Olympe de Gouges and Mary Wollstonecraft are just two of the extraordinary women of the revolution. There exist many other women who empowered, inspired, mobilized and educated other women, including Théroigne de Méricourt (an ardent Amazon and organizer of the club, Amis de la loi), Etta Palm d’Aelders (founder of the Société patriotique et bienfaisance des amies de la vérité and well-known speaker), Pauline Léon, Claire Lacombe, (both prominent members of the Club des Citoyennes Républicaines Révolutionnaires). These women are a very few of the remarkable and noteworthy women who took political action during the Revolution, whether it was through their writings, public protest, or club involvement.

One of the most prominent ways, as well as a more tangible method, for women to become educated in this period was through her involvement in political clubs. Political clubs, or more specifically women’s political clubs, served a number of purposes. At the outset, women’s clubs were modeled after those whose members were strictly male. For the most part, this is a valid assumption. Women, as we have seen, were denied the same education as men, and hence, they had very little or no experience with the workings of political organizations. For men, on the other hand, political involvement was a natural and accepted aspect of their ‘public’ image. So logically, women, having no experience in political affairs, would model their own political club endeavors after those of men, having more experience in political affairs. It did not remain this way, however.

⁹⁴ Proctor 124.
The political club was a realm in which women succeeded in educating themselves, as well as taking an active part in revolutionary politics. “The activism of [female club members], and the reception that it met, was not so unusual in the early years of the Revolution, for especially between 1791 and 1793, women in various parts of France founded political clubs to voice their own support for the Revolution, to educate themselves and their families in revolutionary ideology, and to lend a hand in the war effort.”995 In this as in any other way women chose to express, liberate and empower themselves, no matter how seemingly inconsequential, there were vocal and prominent opponents.

In the case of the Jacobin women’s clubs, the most outstanding opponents were (somewhat surprisingly) the members of the Jacobin men’s clubs. This is surprising in the fact that, at the outset, these women’s clubs were seen as an extension of the men’s clubs.996 Most men’s clubs were in favor of the women beginning their own clubs, and supported their wives and daughters in becoming members of the clubs, because in this way women were helping the men to further the revolutionary cause in an acceptable way. They would be more in the public eye, but not so much that they would be a threat to the authority of the men’s clubs. At the commencement, women had little choice but to follow the club model put forth by men. In some women’s clubs, there were initial problems with fundamentals such as voting, and the women would require help from their male counterparts. Later, however, women were much more autonomous in the clubs, displaying so much political initiative and knowledge that women’s clubs were eventually forced to close by the National Convention in October 1793.

995 Ragan and Williams 12.
996 Ragan and Williams 14.
As women’s clubs actually began to live up to the distinction of a functioning club, the relationships between the two organizations (men’s clubs and women’s clubs) generally deteriorated. But the women’s clubs were a success in some respects, “For even their short-lived independent existence bore testimony to public female participation in the Revolution and contributed over the long term to the political education of French women.”97 And although both the inclusion of women in male political societies and the existence of strictly female political organizations was somewhat short-lived (women’s clubs were outlawed in 1793), they provided women with education they could not have received elsewhere.

While women’s clubs did in some instances receive support from some men, all women’s clubs were ridiculed to some extent. They were often called hermaphrodites and accused of denying their sex. And as sex was seen as the embodiment of gender traits, such as domestic and private, these women were denying the roles they had always known. They became strong and defiant – now and then hosting the charitable festival, but later presenting petitions to the National Assembly and demanding the right to vote directly.

Participation in the political clubs such as Club des Citoyennes Républicaines Révolutionnaires gave women an opportunity to expand their understanding of themselves and their perception of the roles of women. The two presidents of the above-mentioned club were the earlier mentioned Claire Lacombe and Pauline Léon, who “were revolutionaries first and women second.”98 The women who participated in political clubs were women of a somewhat higher standing in society, most likely of the bourgeoisie. Club dues commonly kept women of the lower class from becoming members. It can be hypothesized that another reason for the lack

97 Ragan and Williams 12
of *sans-culotte* in the clubs may concern the men’s clubs, to whom the women’s clubs were seen as auxiliary. Men of the bourgeoisie were far more active in the political realm of the Revolution because of both their higher social standing and likelihood of promoting change (due to the right to vote). The wives of these men, being subject to this political activity, must have caught on, or picked up on this revolutionary fervor and felt it desirable or necessary to initiate their own form of club. And this education was not only one in which women learned by participating in areas previously unfamiliar, but also a form of traditional education, by learning from others.

Women’s clubs were formed not for the purpose of advocating women’s rights, but to further the revolutionary cause, and many of these clubs assumed the character of service organizations.\(^9^8\) While feminism at this time was still unlabeled and unrecognized, it is certain that there was some semblance of feminism within the confines of women’s political activity. And in reading about women’s political clubs, one almost invariably finds some reference to education. And while this type of activism is considered herein a form of non-traditional education, or a seizure of education, the opening of the political clubs and popular societies created new opportunities for women to receive an education\(^1^0^0\) and this political education came closer to a more formal education than did other forms mentioned here.

\(^9^8\) Proctor 47.
\(^9^9\) Proctor 63.
\(^1^0^0\) Melzer and Rabine 81.
Conclusion

The era of the French Revolution was one during which the usual roles and duties of women were challenged, especially in times of civic violence. It was during this period that women came into the important role of wife and mother of the citoyen. Some women of this era struggled to obtain rights equivalent to those enjoyed by the male population.

Although many still believed that the duties of the domestic realm was, in fact, the natural and dutiful position of women. It was a time during which some members of the gentle sex demonstrated their aggressive side and patriotically proclaimed, “J’ai donné un (deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six) citoyen à la République..."101 Predetermined and antiquated characteristics fell by the wayside and they seized the new role of able-bodied revolutionary. Of the women who most certainly participated in events such as the October days, Elise Boulding says, "The heroines of the French Revolution... were a medley of lower-class and laboring women. Their participation in the revolution is somewhat unique in the annals of European history, both because they were so visible and well mobilized during certain crucial events, and because they were so completely excluded from all civic participation even before the revolution was over."102 For those women who participated in revolutionary activities, one result of the Revolution was an awareness by some individuals that women should enjoy the same rights as men. Both prior to and proceeding the Revolution, women were largely not accepted as political beings. Women banded together in political activity, both with and without men. They modeled their behaviors on those of their husbands but later came to obtain their own political persona.

101 Bell 267.
A prominent debate that predated the Revolution was that of women's education. It was believed at this time that women were not suited to be educated because they did not have the same characteristics as men. They were the 'other,' the housewife, the mother, a 'private' being. However, in the Revolution, despite this seemingly endless debate, it came to be believed that, for the sake of the future generations, women should be educated. If for no other reason, women should be educated for the sake of the Republic. Women were the educators of the children who would inherit the Republic and if it were to endure, they would need to be taught well. It was also argued that women did not have the characteristics deemed necessary to be educated precisely because they had never been educated, and there were vocal proponents of women's education during the pre-Revolutionary period. For some, women becoming educated meant becoming more masculine in characteristics, and if women involved in political activity were seen as denying their sex then it seems logical that women who were politically active were in a sense taking it upon themselves to become educated individuals.

All forms of revolutionary political activism can be seen as education. For does not one learn the most from what one personally feels, touches, senses, sees, smells? This is how women involved in revolutionary activity learned: through what they felt touched, sensed, saw — they learned from what they experienced. So then, these women gained an education through the use of militant force, or political involvement, as well as club activity. Even those lower class women categorically denied education learned what revolution meant by storming the Bastille, and succeeding in having its prisoners released. They learned by marching to the palace at Versailles, all the while cringing from hunger pangs and cursing the king and queen's names, later returning victorious, anticipating affordable bread loaves and knowing their actions would
return the king to the capital. They learned that they could take the same actions as their sons and husbands and achieve similar results. They learned that what was expected of them no longer mattered as it once had, and that the only obstacle they faced in being equal to their husbands was the expectations attached to their sex. They had succeeded where they apparently should have failed.
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