It would eventually provide women with a strategy for escaping isolation in the home, carrying them into the male-dominated realm of education and knowledge.

Prescriptions for a stable society that was to emanate directly from harmonious family life dominated the literature of domestic reform. Referring to the need for moral guidance in effecting the Good Society, reformers initiated a discussion of woman's responsibility in educating the nation's future citizenry. Within this discussion the influence of religious doctrine and of protestant ministers themselves is clear.

As pointed out earlier, religious discourse, in the face of radical philosophical and social change, was moving away from an emphasis on predestination to a more liberal interest in effecting earthly moral reforms, particularly from within the family, as a means to eternal salvation and social amelioration. Many ministers, among them the Reverend John S. C. Abbott, turned to women in the millennial quest for a harmonious society.

It is maternal influence, after all, which must be the great agent, in the hand of God, in bringing back our guilty race to duty and happiness. Oh, that mothers could feel this responsibility as they ought... A new race of men would enter upon the busy scene of life, and cruelty and crime would pass away. (Kuhn, 1947, p. 36)

Within the developing Unitarian theology, as well as within some shifting Calvinist rhetoric, the child was no longer defined as inherently sinful and evil but as potentially good or evil depending upon the environment into which he was born. In light of this concept, parental guidance was considered of paramount importance in assuring that he chose his path wisely. According to the doctrine of "Christian Nurture" set forth in 1847 by Horace Bushnell, a young minister fiercely opposed to the strict Calvinist doctrine of conversion, the acquisition of grace by the child was to come from "nurture and internal growth." The need to preserve the child's natural purity while preventing sin placed crucial importance within the naturally nurturant realm of the home. Thus, "the child" signified by "innocence, purity, and potential virtue" became a new sign within a shifting network of meaning that functioned to re-present woman. The mother, "by virtue of an organic power," was attributed the central position in guiding the child toward the development of Christian character (Sklar, 1947, p. 162).

Cott points out that the emphasis on the mother as central in forming the character of her children "departed from (and undermined) the patriarchal ideal prevalent in the colonial period in which the mother, whileentrusted with the physical care of her children, left their religious, moral and intellectual guidance to her husband (Cott, 1977, p. 86). Without actually denying paternal authority, new knowledge about womanhood, functioning as God's truth, was created, assigning to women "naturally" maternal instincts of compassion and nurturance and submitting her to the service of God, her country, and her husband.
The Influence of the Popular Media and Women’s Publication

By midcentury this vision of republican motherhood dominated the essays and stories by female authors in popular ladies’ journals like Sarah Joseph Hale’s Ladies Magazine, which merged with Godfrey’s Ladies Book in 1837, and Ladies Repository, which was edited by Sarah Edgerton. Stories portraying middle-class woman’s “duties, her influence, her mental and moral culture, her social ministry to the human heart...” centered around family life, portraying the heroine as a pure and virtuous young wife and glorifying her maternal role as the anchor of society (Cott, 1977; Douglas, 1977; Kuhn, 1947, p. 43).

Drawings and prints found in these magazines or used as the frontispieces in novels or didactic texts also contributed to the discourse on motherhood. They provide us with a beautiful visual example of the woman that the discource produced. One such drawing is the frontispiece of The American Woman’s Home, a text written by Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe. It features a young woman who is surrounded by her husband and children as she reads. Her lighted face is the focal point of the picture while the others form a halo around her. She holds a small child on her lap while a little girl sits at her feet with a doll on her own lap. The message produced for and by nineteenth-century women by this scene is clear: with woman, the self-sacrificing, nurturant mother-wife, lies the responsibility for the protection of domestic harmony and the survival of the bourgeoisie in the face of increasing social degeneration (Beecher & Beecher Stowe, 1849).

Indeed, though moral guidance and the nurturance of the soul was emphasized as woman’s special responsibility, the insurance of the family’s physical health also became an important concern. The coupling of a healthy family life with a stable and healthy nation linked the Christian discourse of mother-love and republican motherhood to a growing medico-scientific discourse. Within such texts as Sarah Hale’s Manners, Catharine Beecher’s Treatise on Domestic Economy, and Lydia Child’s American Frugal Housewife, among a host of others, female readers were instructed in practical matters of health, food, clothing, infant care, and other household duties in the hope that “correct knowledge would lead to a corresponding correct action” (Beecher, 1843; Child, 1835; Hale, 1848).

The daily activities of the American housewife were put under close scrutiny with specific recommendations made for the insurance of healthy bodies and minds. In turn, the American housewife put her own family’s body under surveillance. Guided by advancements in domestic knowledge, the mother could most carefully and scientifically regulate her family’s activities, insuring the healthy development of her children and fulfilling her role as guardian of the social order.

New knowledge about the nature of woman—produced in a complex web of religious, economic, and social transformation—endowed these women writers with the authority to seek the truth within their assigned private sphere and to prescribe remedies for potential threats to the social order found there. In this way, the social construction of the bourgeois woman functioning in
Guardians of Childhood

Existing regimes of truth ensured the perpetuation of a male-dominated economic system and way of life. By the turn of the twentieth century, the medico-scientific attitude would overshadow the theological as the basis for justifying women's place in relation to knowledge and the public sphere.

For the women writing during the early nineteenth century, however, religious commitment still dominated their efforts to carve out new social positions for women. In this struggle, a number of women within the domestic reform movement pushed the religiously supported discourse on the nature of woman into an insistence on knowledge for women.

Motherlove and Female Education

Inspired by a truth attributed to God's word, and driven by the desire for economic and social freedom, these women, most notably Sarah Hale, Emma Hart Willard, and Catharine Beecher, urged the discourse of motherlove beyond the doorstep of the home by insisting on the necessity of education for women. For example, Hale wrote:

If God designed woman as the preserver of infancy, the inspirer or helper of man's moral nature in its efforts to reach after spiritual things; if examples of women are to be found in every age and nation, who without any special preparation have won their way to eminence in all pursuits tending to advance moral goodness and religious faith, then the policy as well as justice of providing liberally for feminine education, must be apparent to Christian men. (Kuhn, 1947, p. 45)

If women were to carry out the tasks and duties prescribed to them in their special vocation, then it was essential that they be exposed to those bodies of knowledge that, as Willard hoped, would "enable them as mothers, to do all that enlightened reflectiveness can for the happiness of the beings entrusted to them" (Kuhn, 1947, p. 129).

Not only was new knowledge about woman being produced in this discourse, but knowledge about knowledge. That is, a discourse on knowledge for women developed in conjunction with a new construction of the middle-class woman that would catapult them into social relations outside the private realm and into the male-dominated public sphere.

Early practical examples of the interest in knowledge for women are the schools for girls founded, among others, by Willard and Beecher, and moreover, the curricula that were set out for women in these schools. In 1814, Willard began a boarding school for girls in Middlebury, Vermont where she became intensely interested in forming what, in her words, would be "the design of effecting an important change in education, by the introduction of grade schools for women, higher than heretofore known (Willard, 1861). By 1821 she had sowed the seeds for another institution, the Troy Seminary for Female Education in New York state where she stressed that education for women would differ as much from that of men as "women's character and duties" dif-
ferred from men's. Equally committed to the promotion of education for women's vocation, Catharine Beecher founded the Hartford Female Seminary in 1823.

Education for girls would, in Willard's words, "bring its subjects to the perfection of their moral, intellectual and physical nature in order that they may be of greatest possible use to themselves and others" (Cott, 1977, p. 119). To do this, women would be exposed to a curriculum quite different from the "accomplishments" (map-drawing, painting, embroidery, sewing, and so forth) offered in other schools for young ladies. Rather, these schools broke through the barrier protecting the exclusivity of male knowledge by offering courses in the disciplines—rhetoric, logic, natural and moral philosophy, chemistry, history, and Latin (Cott, 1977, p. 115; Sklar, 1973, p. 62).

The founding of these schools and others like them signifies the attempt by women to disrupt the oppressive opposition between subject and object, or knower and known. By appropriating male knowledge, women sought to achieve the status of thinking, knowing subject, though their desire was not (at least at this point) to cross the boundary between man and woman, subject and object. The discourse never denied woman as mother, as womb, as Other. Instead, given access to the appropriate forms of knowledge, woman would improve her otherness, give it special value. She would be womb and more. She would be a rational mother by developing her mind. In Beecher's words, "The exercise of the mind makes [women] realize the high faculties and immortal destinies of our nature." Women would become "ministers" of the "family State" devoted to "the mission of self-denial" and the "self-sacrificing labor of training the ignorant and the weak" (Cross, 1965, p. 83; Sklar, 1973, p. 62).

Although introducing an important shift in the system of meaning producing male/female relations, this discourse did not challenge woman's social subjective position as servant to a male-dominated order. The desire for male knowledge as the key to women's advancement unconditionally accepted man as subject. Indeed, because the truth of woman was located in her reproductive body, it immediately excluded her from a capacity for reason by definition. Whereas it was "natural" for man to be rational, woman was other to rationality because of her reproductive "nature" and could only approach reason through a particular kind of education. This discourse thus reaffirms woman as man's inferior opposite by accepting him as the Absolute, the standard by which she should be measured.

Therefore, in participating in the discourse on knowledge, women did not seek to change their definition as other; rather, they sought to enhance that position, to give it value by introducing Reason (that which differentiated man and made him superior) into the definition.

**Woman as Teacher**

The discursive identification of woman as moral and rational guardian of children easily slid into a discussion of her qualifications as superior teacher in the public schools. With Beecher at the helm, a campaign to install women
into teaching positions across the country was launched, aligning the ideas of domestic reform and the discourse of motherlove with the rhetoric of the common school reformers.

The common school was envisioned by its founders as an institution to ensure a democratic and stable society. For writers like Beecher, struggling to assert women as having natural political influence, it was represented as the natural extension of the home where the nation would "receive its character and its destiny from her hands" (Beecher, 1846). Using the representation of woman produced within the discourse of domestic reform, these writers promoted her as best suited to the moral and democratic influence needed in the public schools. Based on her God-given moral superiority, women's childrearing labor could easily be transported into the public classroom.

The educating of children, that is the true and noble profession of a woman—that is what is worthy of the noblest powers and affections, of the noblest minds... If our success equals our hopes, soon in all parts of our country, in each neglected village or new settlement, the Christian female will quietly take her station, collecting the ignorant children around her teaching them habits of neatness, order, thrift; opening the book of knowledge, inspiring principles of morality and awakening the hope of immortality. (Beecher, 1846, p. 51)

Promoting women's services as particularly crucial to the nation's future, these crusaders described the sufferings of working-class children, particularly those in the "uncivilized" West—ignorant, deprived, neglected—who would be transformed into examples of moral citizenship under the care of sensitive, educated women. Educated woman's self-sacrifice and mercy would lead the human race into salvation. The two places that this could be done were the home and the school. If the home was the church of woman's ministry, the school was only an extension of that, a means of bringing to the "vast multitude of neglected American children" a "proper education" and a "moral environment." By defining the other as in need, in this case children of other, ignorant women, this discourse produced the middle-class woman as superior, as leader and teacher of the degraded. Thus, she was defined and differentiated both as woman—man's opposite—and as part of a superior, more educated class.

The assertion of the middle-class woman as educator, grounded in her naturalized capacity for nurturance, produced her as a facilitator of knowledge. She was a reproducer of knowledge and of the knower, support for, yet opposite of the producer of knowledge (Walkerdine, 1983). "... If men have more knowledge, they have less talent at communicating it, nor have they the patience, the long suffering and gentleness necessary to superintend the formation of character," said Harriet Beecher Stowe (Woody, 1929, p. 463). Despite women's actual participation in producing a certain truth of womanhood, that truth presented women as reproductive not productive. Women's discursive activity was practiced within relations of power and knowledge that repositioned them as servants in the reproduction of man, in particular, middle-class man.