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Moral reform and the rise of the burlesque industry in London, Ontario.

Kelly MacDonald
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MORAL REFORM AND THE RISE OF THE BURLESQUE
INDUSTRY IN LONDON, ONTARIO

by

Kelly MacDonald

A Thesis
Submitted
to the College of Graduate Studies and Research
Through the Department of Sociology and Anthropology
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts at the University of Windsor

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the various ways that the reform movement contributed to the rise of the burlesque industry in London, Ontario, during the period of 1885 to 1917. The purpose of this research is to draw attention to the uneven and contradictory ways that the behaviour of burlesque dancers and other wage-earning women were regulated. Moving beyond the stated aims of moral reform groups and their campaigns, this thesis focuses on the regulatory techniques used to control women at the turn of the century. Analysis of theatre programs, promotional advertisements, press releases, local newspapers and other accounts, highlights the ways that burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women were morally regulated. It is argued that middle class moral reform groups constructed an agenda that would protect and secure their social, political and economic interests in the name of morality. This research, however, reveals that these women were the victims of moral corruption, not by male procurers or the temptations of city life, but by reformers themselves. The moral reform campaign invented the category of female delinquent to legitimate the constant examination of women's moral characters. London moral reformers did more to produce and maintain images of women as sexual delinquents than to prevent them from sexual danger.

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**MORAL REFORM AND THE RISE OF THE BURLESQUE INDUSTRY
IN LONDON, ONTARIO 1885 TO 1917.**

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Introduction: What is Burlesque?

This study examines the various ways that the moral views and regulatory practices of the moral reform movement shaped and directed the burlesque industry in London, Ontario. The focus of this research is on the period of 1885 to 1917, when burlesque dancers and other wage-earning women were the primary targets of moral regulation. The city of London is the focal point of this analysis because it had a thriving theatrical industry during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The size, geographical location and the fact it was a local garrison made London an attractive spot for travelling burlesque troupes. Moral reform groups rejected the less respectable types of working class theatre like burlesque because reformers believed burlesque performances presented images of women that were contrary to public morals and norms of behaviour. Reformers demanded that burlesque shows be regulated, modified, and in some cases cancelled to prevent moral decay and to uphold community standards. In order to understand the burlesque industry in London at the turn of the century, it is necessary to understand how the burlesque theatre worked, the changing performance styles and the phases that burlesque went through in its historical development.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the theatre in North America underwent profound transformations which had a permanent and lasting effect on the industry. These changes included the commercialization of the theatre and the ordering of theatrical genres in a hierarchy from low to high art, from respectable to unrespectable. Class distinctions within the theatre developed which separated middle class from working class entertainment.

Considerable debate has surrounded the origins of the burlesque industry. Because much of the information available is based on rumour and speculation, it is not clear where the first burlesque show was performed or by whom. Aldridge (1971) asserts that the development of the term burlesque is derived from the literal meaning of the word¹ and from its origin in the *Commedia dell'arte*.² For him, the burlesque performance always included some type of sexual humour. Comedy is achieved in the burlesque performance by treating a "low subject" in a highly respected way and by treating a "high subject" in a rude and disrespectful way. Burlesque, then, specializes in making fun of highly respected people, places and things. Burlesque dancers commonly mocked gender roles, politics and all aspects of sexuality in their satirical performances. Politicians, judges and police officers were the most frequent targets of burlesque dancers' satire and disrespect (Aldridge, 1971:568).

In this research the term burlesque refers to a variety of acts. These acts include living pictures, Thompsonian burlesque, minstrel troupes, hootchy-kootchy dancers and salome dancers. Each of these acts were very different in style and form; nevertheless, they all had structure and organization they were not spontaneous performances on demand. All of these burlesque troupes made profits by exposing parts of the female body to audience members to satisfy male voyeuristic pleasures.

¹ The literary meaning of burlesque refers to "An artistic composition especially literary or drama that for the sake of laughter vulgarizes lofty material or treats ordinary material with mock dignity. Any ludicrous or grotesque caricature (Random House Dictionary, 1993:103).

² The *Commedia dell'arte* is a dramatic genre of unknown origin that flourished in Italy from the sixteenth century. It consisted of improvised comedy followed by a scheme rather than written dialogue which made use of stock characters (Oxford Dictionary of Opera, 1992:152).

The Living Picture act, which was one of the original forms of burlesque, became a regular novelty attraction in legitimate theatres at the turn of the century. Also known as the "tableau vivant," the living picture presented attractive models in artistic poses which closely resembled classical subjects. Nudity was a main feature of this act; the bodies of the women were covered only by white flour and a bit of cloth (Lenton, 1983:83-84). The living picture was performed across Canada and the United States from 1885 to 1917. It never achieved the same level of popularity with audiences as the other forms of burlesque entertainment.

Thompsonian burlesque was a very popular form of burlesque during the late nineteenth century. Lydia Thompson and her famous *British Blondes* introduced a new form of burlesque to North American audiences in their presentation of the classical play the *Ixion*. In this production the British Blondes appeared in traditional male parts or "breeches roles." The female dancers wore revealing male costumes that resembled the Greek tunic. The show was a dramatic performance that combined music, song and dance. The British Blondes acted out the original script and, at the same time, made the play humorous by their costumes, gestures, attitudes, tone of voice and their inversion of gender roles (Lenton, 1990:194; Allen, 1991:5-7). This form of burlesque was so popular that numerous other "blonde troupes" followed in their direction, making Thompsonian burlesque an instant success.

Another early form of burlesque was the remade version of the old minstrel show commonly referred to as "girlie" burlesque. The minstrel show was extremely popular with Ontario audiences at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As part of the variety show, the traditional version of the minstrel show presented a well mixed, very fast paced number of specialty acts. The acts included singers, dancers, acrobats, comedians and novelty acts. Minstrel shows usually had standard formats which were divided into three

segments. The shows opened with the entire cast singing several different songs in a row. The second part, known as the olio, was a mixture of specialty acts ranging from magic shows to comedic skits. The closing act was the extravaganza which usually included some type of trapeze act or physical stunt. In a study of variety theatre in Toronto at the turn of the century, Lenton (1983) suggests that the traditional version of the minstrel show was transformed by show operators when they added the female element. The extravaganza segment of the show was replaced with a burlesque act. This type of girlie burlesque commonly featured dancing girls performing the can-can or some kind of comic skit that always included some aspect of satire and sexual humour (1983:78).

The hootchy-kootchy (cooch) or the belly dance was introduced into burlesque after it was first performed at the Chicago World Fair in 1893 by Little Egypt (Aldridge, 1971:569; Lenton, 1991:195; Allen, 1991:225). This form of burlesque was very different from the others because the performers did not sing, tell jokes, or portray high-class art. The cooch performance consisted of women in midriff-exposing costumes gyrating their hips in a sexually suggestive manner (Lenton, 1991:195). According to Allen, the cooch dance was added to the burlesque performance as an attempt to make the "new science of anthropology popular, and it was commonly presented as a cultural exhibit in side-show tents at local fairs" (1990:225).

The salome dance or the dance of seven veils appeared shortly after the first presentation of the cooch dance and was the immediate precursor to the strip-tease. The salome dance was a disrobing act in which dancers teased their audiences; however, they never removed all of their clothing. According to Lenton (1983) this form of the dance was first performed in Toronto theatres by Florenz Ziegfeld Jr.'s original follies as *The Follies of 1907* (Lenton, 1983:349). Ziegfeld's shows were very popular with middle class audiences and generally went uncensored since they presented themselves as high

class follies, not working class burlesque. Ziegfield cleverly disguised female nudity behind art and glamour. Since the follies incorporated a burlesque dance into the act, a censorship war in Toronto broke out between moral reformers and burlesque dancers (Lenton, 1983:350). Similar battles were waged in London over the moral acceptability of shows in that city.

The moral reform movement played an instrumental role in censoring the shows that Ontario, and particularly London, residents saw during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada Linda Kealey (1979) examines the moral reform movement in Canada. She suggests that the moral reform movement consisted of a diverse assortment of educated individuals who were mainly from the Anglo-Saxon professional and business groups. Individual members ranged from doctors, lawyers, and city officials, to feminists and right wing clergy members. Aspects of moral reform culminated primarily in an urban movement in Canada that received little support from rural areas. The movement was privately funded and not controlled by the state (Kealey, 1979:4-5).³

At the turn of the century moral reformers in urban centres had a greater impact on the regulation of local and imported travelling burlesque troupes than the Canadian government, the legal system, or police officials. The moral reform movement was a very powerful force in shaping and directing the individual consciousness and behaviour of English speaking Canadians during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The goal of moral reform was to "raise the moral tone" of individual Canadians, particularly the working class. The agenda of the movement was usually linked to controlling and illuminating the social concerns of middle class reformers. She points out that these

³ Kealey's description and list of moral reform members will be used when referring to the term "reformers" in this research.

concerns were an amalgam of different issues: temperance, prostitution, the white slave trade, immigration and racial purity (Valverde, 1991:15-17).

During the period of 1885 to 1917 middle class reformers used the regulation of the theatre as a way to control and eliminate these social concerns. As Valverde (1991) notes, the fears that lay beneath the white slavery panic, the temperance movement, the anti-prostitution campaign and the social purity movement were actually fears of dramatic changes in the social, economic and cultural spheres. Middle class moral reform groups were threatened by the transformations that industrial capitalism and urban growth created in Canadian society. Moral reformers worried that they would have to give up their class positions which gave them economic superiority over to the newly formed working class (Valverde, 1991:131).

The changing and turbulent environment at the turn of the century left middle class moral reformers very uncertain about the kind of future they would have. Out of desperation to secure and maintain their middle class positions which gave them the power to be social, economic and cultural authorities, reformers attempted to use the regulation of the theatre as a way to control the changes going on in society. It was at this point that class distinctions made their way into the theatre by separating middle class from working class entertainment.

By creating a division and a hierarchy between respectable middle class forms of theatre and less respectable working class versions, reformers attempted to secure their dominant position. Valverde (1991:93) asserts that one of the most effective strategies reformers used to legitimate their moral and cultural authority was to convince people that society was becoming the victim of moral decay. As a result, made reformers' attempts to regulate and modify immoral behaviour seem necessary and unquestioned. Moral reformers used the theatre to impose their middle class ideals onto the working classes,

making these ideals seem natural, normal and legitimate. The theatre had become an instrument of moral discourse⁴ where moral reformers attempted to use their moral views to control and modify burlesque performances in London theatres during the period of 1885 to 1917.

Burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women became the targets of moral regulation at the turn of the century for very similar reasons. The behaviour of these women were viewed by moral reformers as a serious social problem that needed to be controlled. Both groups were morally dangerous, in the view of reformers, because they publically rejected their assumed roles as wives and mothers. Middle class reformers were threatened by burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women because they were fearful that dramatic changes in gender relations would weaken male power and authority over women. The "unruly" and defiant behaviour of these women violated traditional gender norms dictating the way that women could act during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women used several different techniques to subvert pre-determined gender codes.

Burlesque dancers used their excessive displays of femininity and sexuality to transgress men's patriarchal domination and control over women within society. With their sexual humour, their sexually suggestive songs and their risqué costumes, burlesque dancers boldly made fun of and at the same time publicly defied gender roles. Through their performances burlesque dancers inverted gender norms making them appear comical and nonsensical to their audiences. In the name of fun and entertainment burlesque dancers brought up serious questions about gender and women's roles within patriarchal

⁴ In this thesis the term discourse closely resemble Foucault's (1979:10-12) definition. For Foucault, discourses are ways of producing and exchanging ideas, knowledge and meaning. Discourses are so powerful that they can go unnoticed to the individual, making them seem very natural and normal.

culture which reformers found subversive and unsettling. Burlesque dancers flaunted their volumptuous figures, their physical beauty and their sexual power while on stage to control and dominate their male audiences.

Moral reformers were also fearful that the behaviour of single wage-earning women would transform women's roles and gender relations within society. Consequently these women became a source of concern. Moral reformers expected women to follow these traditional and rigid gender codes despite all of the changes that were going on around them at the turn of the century. Single wage-earning women challenged gender norms through their waged labour. Reformers were threatened by the economic independence and social autonomy that these women gained through paid work. Women's public presence in urban centres, the workplace and working class theatres posed a problem for reformers.

This thesis examines the moral regulation of burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women in London, Ontario, from 1885 to 1917. The purpose of this study is to show that these women were the victims of moral corruption, not by male procurers or temptations of city life, but by reformers themselves. In this research it is argued that the moral reform campaign invented the category of female delinquent to encourage the examination of women's moral characters. Moral reformers did more to produce and maintain sexually delinquent images of these women than they did to protect them from sexual danger which was their stated aim.

Chapter One, examines the theoretical orientations used in this research. Relevant theoretical ideas within the literature on moral reform are presented and discussed through a feminist post-structuralist framework. This chapter highlights the various ways that the category of female moral delinquent has been produced and maintained within the

rhetoric of moral reform. The underlying factors that facilitated reformers' views and related practices are explored and critically analyzed.

Chapter Two, presents the methodology used to collect and analyze social historical data found on the burlesque theatre, the moral reform movement and single wage-earning women in London from 1885 to 1917. Several techniques were used to locate, gather, record and code information found in primary and secondary sources. The qualitative social historical approach used closely follows Valverde's (1991) study on moral reform in Canada at the turn of the century.

Chapter Three provides a brief historical overview of the burlesque industry in London from 1885 to 1917. The divisions which separated the legitimate from the illegitimate theatre is explored and the role of moral reform groups in maintaining these distinctions is analyzed. Strategies used by theatre owners, show managers, and burlesque dancers to deceive reformers and pass off their acts as respectable are presented. This chapter also examines burlesque dancers, the companies they worked for, and the type of theatres in which they performed. A detailed analysis of local scandals involving burlesque dancers, moral reform groups and police officials is presented.

Chapter Four examines the regulatory techniques moral reform groups used to control the behaviour of burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women in London from 1885 to 1917. Local newspapers, community watchfulness, gossip, legal regulation and public shame were the primary tools reformers used to regulate these women and to win the support of London residents for their regulatory aims. When these techniques failed reformers constructed censorship committees to censor and cancel burlesque shows that committee members deemed immoral. The effectiveness of the regulatory techniques reformers used to control burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women is explored.

Chapter One

Theoretical Orientation: Moral Reform and the Regulation of Burlesque

At the turn of the century moral reformers were preoccupied with controlling the behaviour of burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women who rejected their traditional roles as wives and mothers. Moral reformers concealed their fears of changing gender relations, female autonomy and family breakdown into the regulation of the burlesque industry. Reformers dealt with these fears by creating a reform campaign that encouraged the examination and scrutiny of womens' moral characters based on their presumed sexual behaviour, personal autonomy and economic independence. These examinations served to legitimate the restrictions that moral reformers placed on female dancers and single wage-earning women that impinged upon these womens' lives by controlling their leisure time, their wages and their sexual behaviour. The purpose of this chapter is to show that the strict rules and regulations imposed by the moral reform campaign invented female delinquents based on women's unwillingness to give up their personal autonomy and assume their domestic responsibilities.

Several social historians and feminist theorists have examined the meanings and images of single wage-earning women living in urban settings during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Walkowitz, 1982; Peiss, 1986; Meyerowitz, 1988; Valverde, 1991; Dubinsky, 1993; Strange, 1995). These scholars recognized this period as a sexually dangerous time that produced dramatic social tensions. In Ontario women's roles were being transformed as they left their unpaid work in the home for wage labour in industrialized cities. Never before had young Ontario women left their parents home for paid employment. Single wage-earning women's employment in factories, department stores and offices were considered to be temporary or part-time by their parents, and

employers who expected wage-earning women to return to their domestic duties once they got married and had children (Strange, 1995:4).

In an effort to secure and legitimate their roles of cultural and moral authority middle class reformers attempted to convince other community members that single wage-earning women were vulnerable to crime, immorality and vice and therefore had to be controlled. Carolyn Strange (1995) examined the "girl problem" in Toronto at the turn of the century. She asserts that the moral reform movement generated a moral discourse of the "working girl" as the chief victim and villain of urban danger and immorality. Record numbers of single women left Ontario farms and small communities in the late nineteenth century for paid employment in larger cities (Strange, 1995:5). Strange suggests that industrial and demographic changes were far more complex than shifts in the population or the economy; a "cultural transformation" was occurring. The way that people lived in relation to each other as family members, neighbours and as men and women was reorganized. This reorganization resulted in Canadians developing new views of themselves and their environments. Numerous individuals disliked the changes brought about by women's participation in the public sphere and were convinced that the economic and industrial advancements would have devastating social costs (Strange, 1995:212).

Moral reformers used several different strategies to prevent the reorganization of women's roles. One strategy middle class moral reformers used to secure their power and control over single wage-earning women was to convince people that society was becoming the victim of moral decay and that the moral character of the nation and its subjects needed to be reconstructed and reorganized (Valverde, 1991:93). Valverde and Weir (1988) suggest that the ultimate goal of the moral reform movement in Canada was to create a particular kind of citizen in order to preserve and enhance the overall morality

of the nation. Moral regulation required the creation or "formation" of a moral subjectivity that would not only be congruent with but also provide the basis for "nation building" (1988:31). For Valverde and Weir,

nation-building was not synonymous or even coterminous with state formation: while the state needed citizens, the nation needed moral subjects, subjects with character. The difference between the mob and the nation was precisely character, and, conversely, an individual without character was a miniature mob (Valverde and Weir, 1988:31).

In the face of an uncertain future, middle class moral reformers attempted to turn single wage-earning women into moral citizens. Reformers tried to convince young wage earning women that they were contributing to the morality of the nation by deferring personal pleasure and gratification that workplace and leisure activities had to offer. They argued that the process of building a nation that was moral and prosperous was more important than individual pleasure, freedom or autonomy, because the success of the individual depended upon the success of the nation (Valverde, 1995:104).

Valverde and Weir's arguments on nation building can be used to show how London moral reform groups attempted to turn burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women into moral citizens. The process of nation-building is useful in that it reveals reformers efforts to link and associate womens' moral character to their sexual character. Therefore, it was the reconstruction of single wage-earning women's and burlesque dancer's sexual character that was required to build the nation and prevent moral decay.

Moral reformers viewed character as something that an individual earned through daily activities and through the control of sexual desires. In a study of the history of

sexual pleasure, courtship, and sexual violence in Ontario from 1880 to 1929, Karen Dubinsky (1993) asserts that "sexuality" was incorporated into the project of "nation building, civic pride and economic renewal." She suggests that sexual and moral standards were being reconstituted during this period of transition. Therefore, the discourse of nation building was as much about creating moral citizens as it was about shaping sexual and moral codes and behaviours (Dubinsky, 1993:4).

The process of nation building could not have resulted in social, moral or economic benefits for society until the basic principles of nation building were adopted and accepted by single wage-earning women. According to Foucault (1985) moral views and practices also had to be adopted by social institutions (the family, schools, church) in order for these moral views to be effective. He notes that it is within social institutions that people learn the moral concepts that they use to construct their inner character or "subjectivity." For Foucault, subjectivity is the way that individual men and women think about themselves and their relation to the world. The conscious and unconscious thoughts of individuals are shaped by the positions with which they identify in the social world. These identifications, he argues, constitute each individual's sense of self, his or her subjectivity. The production of inner subjectivity is an ongoing process which is constantly being reconstituted each time the individual thinks or speaks (Foucault, 1985:27-30).

The creation of an individual's subjectivity, Valverde (1991) asserts, in English Canada was guided by very specific ideas about self-control and moral reform. At the turn of the century, the discourse of excessive sexuality was seen as the greatest threat to the moral character of the individual and the nation. According to Valverde sexual desire was perceived by reformers, especially clergy members and philanthropy groups, as a dangerous force that if left untamed, had the potential to destroy the nation. Since the

nation is different from the state; the nation is vulnerable to decay if individuals fail to take control over their own moral character and sense of self (Valverde, 1991:27-29).

By controlling the sexual and moral attitudes of both single wage-earning women and burlesque dancers reformers believed that they could prevent the reconstruction of gender roles which gave single wage-earning women more sexual freedom and personal autonomy and thus threatened the nation. Valverde's ideas on the problem of nationhood and sexual autonomy in Canada can be applied to London to show that these problems were an underlying factor that facilitated local moral reform efforts.

Inventing Delinquency

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the moral reform movement conducted extensive investigations into the social and moral costs of industrialization and urbanization within society. Moral reformers were concerned that single wage-earning women's participation in the workforce would lead them to abandon their moral values and their respectability. Working in close proximity to men in factories, department stores and offices, reformers feared could potentially place single wage-earning women into situations where they would be corrupted by their male co-worker's foul language, sexual advances and their bad habits such as smoking and drinking.

In Toronto moral reform groups hired undercover agents to go into factories to investigate the social and moral implications of paid employment on single wage-earning women. Strange (1995) discovered that numerous female investigators were sent to work in garment, biscuit and paper box factories in an effort to learn the secrets of wage-earning women. Investigators were instructed to monitor closely the behaviour and attitudes of suspicious women. Rather than being concerned with the long hours or even the working conditions that the wage-earning women had to endure; the main issue of the

investigation was to uncover what these women did in their spare time (Strange, 1995:118).

Moral reform commissions evaluated the findings of these inquiries and called for the stricter regulation and close supervision of single wage-earning women by their parents, employers and community members (Strange, 1995:117). Reformers evaluated the social costs of paid employment on men and women very differently. No attempts were made by reformers to control the behaviour of male workers, nor were reformers concerned about the moral effects of paid labour on men (Strange, 1995:4,22). Reformers believed that the only solution to the "girl problem" was to focus on the morality of single wage-earning women who worked in factories, department stores and offices (Strange, 1995:22-23). The findings of reformers' investigations led to the implementation of rules that would protect single wage-earning women from the potential social evils of the workplace. These rules extended the hours of the working day and drastically reduced the duration and frequency of breaks. Reformers presumed that training single wage-earning women to be efficient and dedicated workers would improve their moral respectability, by teaching female workers time management skills reformers and factory owners would ensure women would not fall prey to immorality and vice (1995:190-191).

Moral reformers were attempting to mould the character of single wage-earning women into obedient and disciplined workers so that they would one day become obedient and disciplined wives and mothers. The control of single wage-earning women in the workplace, was a tool reformers used to prevent the reconstruction of gender roles within society and to legitimate their position of male power and authority. Foucault's theory of carceral continuum can be used to highlight reformers efforts to identify and control the moral implications of industrial progress on single wage-earning women in London at the turn of the century.

Foucault (1979) argues that a "carceral continuum" developed as a new type of disciplinary power over the social body, targeting individuals who resisted "disciplinary normalization." The continuum included a wide range of actors and disciplinary methods. The carceral was rationalized and justified through a psychiatric or therapeutic apparatus that was applied to the entire population. The ultimate goal of the carceral continuum was to identify and treat deviants. He suggests,

As a result, a certain significant generality moved between the least irregularity and the greatest crime; it was no longer the offense, the attack was common interest, it was the departure from the norm, the anomaly; it was this that haunted the school, the court, the asylum or the prison. It generalized in the sphere of meaning the function that the carceral generalized in the sphere of tactics. Replacing the adversary of the sovereign, the social enemy was transformed into a deviant, who brought with him crime, disorder, madness (Foucault, 1979:299-300).

For Foucault a large number of other institutions outside the prison and the criminal law employed these mechanisms; he referred to them as the "carceral archipelago." Groups that used the carceral methods included: "charitable societies, moral improvement associations," and philanthropy groups (Foucault, 1979:297). Since the carceral had wide-reaching networks, it had the ability to "recruit major delinquents" and to organize them into "disciplinary careers." He suggests that the carceral produced delinquency in the same way that it disciplined them (Foucault, 1979:300).

At the turn of the century moral reform groups played a significant role in organizing single wage-earning women and female dancers into "disciplinary careers" which

legitimated and justified moral reformers constant examination and inspection of their moral characters and their presumed sexuality. Foucault asserts that one of the most powerful effects the carceral system had was its ability to naturalize and legitimate the power to punish beyond the walls of the prison. It becomes natural and normal to be punished within society by one of the "far-reaching" networks and institutions. He suggests that coercive responses and normalizing processes were deployed simultaneously (Foucault, 1979:303).

Strange (1995) argues that the "carceral continuum" was applied to wage-earning women at the turn of the century in Toronto (Strange, 1995:129). Women's separation from the family home, when searching for paid employment loosened their fathers' patriarchal control over them. As the women became physically and socially isolated from their families and their communities, their behaviour violated pre-determined gender codes. By rejecting their idealized roles as wives and mothers, single wage earning women became seen as a threat to domestic norms and the continued survival of the community (Strange, 1995:5). Like Foucault, Strange suggests that coercive responses or the "carceral archipelago" and normalizing practices were employed simultaneously. She notes that reformers' regulatory efforts ranged from arranging forms of supervised entertainment to arresting women who participated in them (Strange, 1995:19).

Strange and Foucault's ideas can be used to show how the regulatory methods, or the "carceral archipelago," was used by middle class moral reformers in London to naturalize and legitimate their power to control burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women. It was commonly assumed by reformers and community leaders that both of these groups of women could be persuaded into trading their moral respectability for employment, steady incomes, and amusement. The regulatory practices used by London moral reformers to control burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women were similar to

those used by reformers throughout the province which included: community watchfulness, local gossip, legal regulation, newspapers, public shame and censorship.

Sexuality

Women whose behaviour violated traditional gender norms were viewed by moral reformers as female delinquents. The sexuality of burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women evoked fears of sexual chaos and disorder for middle class moral reformers in similar ways. The assumed "sexual behaviour" of both groups of women were considered to be a violation of the traditional gender norms that defined women's sexuality and their roles as wives and mothers. Burlesque dancers were morally dangerous because they used their excessive displays of femininity and sexuality to transgress and subvert men's domination and control over women within society. These female performers commonly mocked gender roles, politics and sexuality in their shows through their styles of dress, demeanor and actions. The sexuality of single wage-earning women was a problem for reformers who were convinced that these women's social independence would lead to their sexual independence and moral downfall.

The sexuality of female dancers was a topic of concern for reformers, ministers, and even feminists, according to Allen (1991:127), because it represented a form of criminal sexuality that had the power to delight and horrify. He suggests that the sexuality of the burlesque dancer was very powerful in that it presented a "debased, dirty and unworthy" image that could elicit both fear and male sexual desire. Burlesque dancers while on stage were in complete control of their sexuality. These women cleverly flaunted this control to shock and dominate their audiences using their voluptuous beauty and their subversive humour. Audience members were taken in by these female dancer's physical beauty, and

at the same time horrified by these womens' bold and "shameless" attitudes toward their sexuality (Allen, 1991:26).

Allen suggests that burlesque dancers used their sexuality to reverse and transgress gender relations by presenting images of women as powerful and men as powerless (Allen, 1991:206).⁵ In order to achieve this goal, burlesque dancers flaunted their sexual power and inversion of gender norms by assuming traditionally masculine roles on stage. Dressed in tight-fitting male costumes these women often impersonated soldiers, warriors, lawyers, politicians and police officers. According to Allen, female dancers were indirectly attempting to show audiences that women at the turn of the century could use their feminine sexual power to dominate men (Allen, 1991:205). The transgressive nature of the burlesque performers' sexuality had the ability to undermine predetermined notions of class, culture and male dominance which made burlesque dancers very dangerous. By taking on male roles, female dancers were exposing and challenging men's right to dominate women. Reformers' fears of unruly or deviant women were essentially fears of women's control over their sexuality. In their performances burlesque dancers took middle class notions of femininity and respectability and inverted them making these notions appear humorous and nonsensical to their audiences (Allen, 1991:127-129).

The presumed sexuality of single wage-earning women was also viewed by middle class reformers as unruly and out of control. The social autonomy and economic independence that single wage-earning women gained through their participation in the workforce, reformers argued, would lead to these womens sexual and moral downfall.

⁵ Allen (1991:204-207) suggests that the power of burlesque dancers to dominate their male audience members was often presented in burlesque posters. For example, the *Bon-Ton Burlesquers* poster entitled "On The String" depicts five well-dressed men tied up in strings dancing around the feet of a giant female performer while she pulls their "strings."

Reformers believed that single wage-earning women were not concerned about their sexual reputations, their chastity, or their decisions to delay marriage and motherhood because they were overwhelmed by their new found freedom and distance from parental control (Strange,1995:4-9). Moral reformers were fearful that these women would use their sexuality, like burlesque dancers, for their own social and economic gains.

Moral reformers transferred these fears into regulatory actions. One technique reformers used to regulate the sexual behaviour of burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women was to place labels on women who participated in sexually offensive behaviours. Labels such as "delinquent," "vagrant" and "incorrigible" were used to define single wage-earning women and burlesque dancers whose behaviour violated the boundaries of traditional gender norms. As Strange (1991:148) suggests, the problem with these labels was that they were so broadly defined that they could include almost any behaviour. The labels that were applied to women always had a sexual meaning. For example, the charge of vagrancy was applied differently to men and women in Toronto at the turn of the century. For men, vagrancy meant sleeping on the streets, begging or loitering, but for women vagrancy had a sexual meaning. For women vagrancy could mean living with a man without being married, staying out all night without parents' consent, or being "suspected" of engaging in pre-marital sex (Strange, 1995:148).

Another technique used to regulate single wage-earning women's sexual behaviour during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was through by-laws. Local by-laws were used by reformers to control the behaviour of both burlesque dancers and wage-earning women by regulating public places of entertainment. As Strange (1995) notes, after 1896 in Ontario, local police and reform groups had the power to create their own by-laws. The regulation of dancehalls through by-laws was one way reformers indirectly regulated women. By-laws on the licensing of commercial establishments gave

reformers and police the power to control every aspect of the business. By controlling the hours of operation, the consumption of alcohol, and the age of consent, reformers were indirectly controlling women's behaviour and their assumed sexuality (Strange, 1995:149). Bylaw were also used by middle class moral reformers to enforce traditional gender norms on young women. By-laws were such a powerful regulatory tool that they had the authority to prohibit young women from entering certain public establishments without a male escort. As Strange notes, these type of by-laws that restricted women from frequenting public places in Toronto at the turn of the century were usually applied to saloons and taverns. By-laws gave local police officials the authority to decide if women had been escorted to saloons or if they had come alone with the intent to "pick-up men." Despite any evidence, Toronto police officials could charge these women with prostitution based on the suspicion of officers. According to Strange, there was no provision in these by-laws which regulated the behaviour of unescorted men who frequented saloons. She suggests that if reformers and police really wanted to protect single wage-earning women from sexual danger and urban vice it would have been far more effective to regulate the behaviour of men instead of punishing women for men's sexual advances. Therefore, it is evident that by-laws were used by reformers to reinforce assumed gender norms (Strange, 1995:150).

Strange's findings can be used to show how negative labels were applied by moral reformers in London to legitimate their treatment of single wage-earning women and burlesque dancers deemed to be sexual delinquents and to reaffirm male power and privilege. Her analysis of how by-laws were created by reformers to indirectly control the behaviour of single wage-earning women and burlesque dancers and to enforce public gender norms can be applied to reformers regulatory aims in London at the turn of the century.

Leisure

Moral reformers attempted to regulate single wage-earning women's leisure time by attempting to persuade young wage-earning women to stay away from unrespectable forms of commercial amusements which placed them in the company of strange men. Illegitimate theatres, dancehalls and amusement parks allowed single wage-earning women to interact with men. These meeting places enabled women to defy and undermine pre-determined dating norms.

Kathy Peiss (1986) examines single wage-earning women and their pursuit of entertainment in urban spaces in New York City during the period of 1880 to 1920. She suggests that the commercial amusement industry was a social space where notions of "sexuality, courtship, male power, female dependency and autonomy" were expressed and legitimated. The entertainment industry became a place where dominant cultural notions were reaffirmed, and new cultural patterns or behaviors were introduced (Peiss, 1986:4). Prior to the twentieth century, cultural ideologies about women's roles did not support or even consider a concept of women's leisure. Peiss argues that young wage-earning women were creating a culture of their own by developing trendy ways to dress, dance and act that were often inspired by what they saw on the stage (Peiss, 1986:5).

Theatre-going was the most popular form of entertainment for wage-earning women at the turn of the century. According to Peiss, "cleaned up versions" of variety shows attracted large working-class crowds. Theatre managers realized the money to be made through attracting wage-earning women to their shows. As a result managers used several techniques to draw women to the shows. One method used to entice wage-earning women into the theatre was to offer them free admission to most afternoon matinees and to "Ladies' Invitation Nights." Attractive and useful door prizes were also used to lure

female patrons into the show. Prizes ranged from dress patterns to household necessities such as coal, flour and sugar (Peiss,1986:142).

These cultural advances made by women were not well received by all community members in the United States or Canada. Clergy members and ministerial groups, particularly disliked the fact that women were making a place of their own outside of the domestic realm. As Strange (1995) suggests, several labels were applied to wage-earning women who frequently spent time in commercial amusement districts in Toronto at the turn of the century. One popular label was that of the "good times girl." Good times girls were depicted as moral degenerates or "pick-ups" who occasionally traded their sexual favors for a night out on the town (Strange, 1995:19).

The important argument that both Peiss and Strange are making is that the public presence of single wage-earning women in entertainment districts, in New York and Toronto, that were formerly off-limits for women was a visible reminder of changing women's roles. Their analysis can be used to show how the public presence of single wage-earning women and burlesque dancers conjured up the same fears for moral reform groups in London during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Their ideas can also be used to highlight the ways that the sexual implications of wage earning women's leisure time was a constant concern for reformers in London who appointed themselves as the primary guardians of public morals.

According to Peiss, the cultural and class struggle that developed between middle class reformers and wage-earning women was often depicted in the early movies. Numerous silent films around 1910 poked fun at moral reform efforts, particularly temperance groups and philanthropists, who attempted to impose middle class standards of morality upon working class amusements. For example, the film *Committee on Art* presented a man gazing voyeuristically at several risqué posters of burlesque dancers, when

suddenly out of nowhere a group of moral reformers arrive and pin blouses and skirts on the female dancers depicted in the posters (Peiss, 1986:157-158).

Early films like burlesque performances made fun of moral reformers attempts to regulate women's behaviour. The analysis of American filmmakers can be used to reveal how working class theatres, dancehalls, and saloons became the targets of regulation in London because they were used by burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women to express and legitimate their independence from male authority, their autonomy and their views on courtship and sexuality.

In a study of public places in Toronto during the 1940's, Adams (1994) suggests that the moral character of individuals who frequented public places deemed morally dangerous played a significant role in the way that they were viewed by others. She notes that the reputation of social spaces had an regulatory effect on the individuals who spent time in them. Reformers' particularly clergy members and philanthropy groups, believed that certain social places were conducive to vice and immorality. The reputation or moral standing of each public place was based on the behaviour and activities of the people who frequented them. Therefore, amusement parks were not any more immoral than theatres, music halls or alleyways. It was the presumed sexual activity that separated one place from another (Adams, 1994:218).

The important point that Adams is making is that moral reform campaigns not only focused on the behaviour of people but also their environments. Her argument is useful because it reveals that single wage-earning women in Toronto were often regulated for simply leaving their parents farms and inhabiting urban places which became stigmatized by middle class moral reformers. Adam's findings can be used to highlight the ways that single wage-earning women's mere physical presence in London workplaces, entertainment districts and public places made them deviant.

In an effort to restrict single wage-earning women from commercial amusements reformers attempted to stigmatize the places where women flaunted their defiance of pre-determined gender codes. Dubinsky (1993) argues that in rural areas in Ontario it was very common for local residents to think of social places or regions in sexual terms. She asserts that places become labeled much like deviant individuals. Certain sites become associated with "particular views, historic feelings and events" (Dubinsky, 1993:145). Region was an important determining factor in the way that each community viewed sexuality, morality and crime. Region also played a key role in the way that deviant rural places were labeled and the individuals who frequented them disciplined (Dubinsky, 1993:6).

Dubinsky's arguments on rural Ontario can be applied to London to reveal the ways that social places in London were viewed by reform groups and community members as deviant and in need of regulation. Her analysis of rural social places being associated in sexual terms can be used to reveal how moral reformers thought of urban working class theatres and places of amusement in sexual terms. Her ideas can also be used to highlight moral reformers' role in labeling London working class theatres as deviant and regulating single wage-earning women and burlesque dancers who frequented them.

The regulatory aims and disciplinary actions of reform members were very different for men and women even when they were found in the same deviant social spaces. As Adams (1994) notes, both young men and young women were labeled delinquents by reformers, city officials, the legal system; young women were charged for being in the wrong "kind of place" that lacked parental or adult supervision, young men were charged when they engaged in criminal behaviour. The punishment they received from the legal system and the community, however, was very different. She asserts that young women were more frequently charged with "non-property crimes" such as vagrancy,

incorrigibility and immorality; young men were charged with trespassing, vandalism, theft, vagrancy. Young women were labeled as moral delinquents and young men became criminal delinquents. Adams claims that there was a heavy focus on the sexual integrity of young women and the sexual aspects of young men's problems was ignored. Deviant behaviour of young women was linked to their presumed overactive, uncontrolled sexual desires, and that of young men was blamed on hanging around with the wrong crowd or joining gangs. She suggests that unlike young women, young men never became criminals for simply being sexual delinquents (Adams, 1994:224-225).

Adams' findings in Toronto can be used to show that London moral reformers also did not believe that single wage-earning women or even burlesque dancers were capable of regulating themselves and therefore needed help from reform groups and community members. Men were never subject to moral regulation in the same ways that these two groups of women were. Adams ideas point out the double standard of moral regulation by highlighting the ways that different groups or classes within communities are controlled. Her analysis can be used to explain the ways that burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women were treated in London at the turn of the century by middle class moral reformers.

Class divisions within the theatre

Class divisions were created within the theatre as a way for middle class moral reformers to separate middle class from working class entertainment. These divisions were used by reformers to create a hierarchy in the theatre separating respectable from less respectable theatrical forms. David Gardner (1997) examined the theatre in Ontario during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In his study he suggests that there were two main currents within the theatre which he refers to as the "the serious and

the popular; high art and low; the legitimate theatre and the illegitimate." The "legitimate" theatre got its name through its connection with high class British theatre. Dramatic presentations of Shakespeare plays and other serious dramas were viewed as legitimate. The illegitimate theatre or the "low art" contained a variety of acts whose main intent was to amuse and entertain with music, comedy and satire (Gardner, 1997:121).

Moral reform groups used the divisions within the theatre to separate middle class from working class entertainment. Reformers used the theatre to impose their middle class morals, values and cultural tastes upon the working classes (Armstrong, 1992:189-190). According to Peiss (1986) the illegitimate theatre was commonly referred to by moral reform societies as the "cheap theatre." Moral reformers rejected the cheap or illegitimate theatre for several reasons. First, cheap theatres were social sites for the working-classes, where "gossip, singing, footstomping, and vendor's cries contributed to the theatrical experience" (Peiss, 1986:140-141). The stages of these theatres became the very places where working class culture was created. New ideas of working class "womanhood, sexuality, and leisure" were being acted out and debated inside the theatre (Peiss, 1986:163). Second, moral reformers rejected cheap amusements because they were perceived as "appealing to the low instincts of the masses;" which "debased womanly virtues," by presenting a dangerous and contradictory image of the dominant and prevailing notions of gender and femininity. Third, single wage-earning women's participation in cheap amusements or working class culture were viewed by moral reformers as an indication of these women's willingness to engage in immoral heterosexual relations and sexual promiscuity. In a period when gender roles were being transformed and reconstructed, the creation of a working class culture that was different

from the middle classes' was very dangerous from the point of view of reformers (Peiss, 1986:163).

Middle class reformers attempted to regulate women and the working class for several reasons. Valverde (1991) suggests that the dominant class was simultaneously "creating and reaffirming" their own class position and interests while imposing their values on working class communities. She asserts that reformers wanted the working classes to accept their values in an effort to legitimate the cultural values of the middle class. In Canada, this protection of middle class interests could be extended to include the protection of their own cultural tastes (Valverde, 1991:29). In his examination of burlesque and American culture, Allen argues that burlesque theatre was a problem for the ruling classes because it represented the culture of the "low other." He describes the "low other" as "something that is reviled by and excluded from the dominant social order as debased dirty, unworthy, but that is simultaneously the object of desire and/or fascination." Members of the ruling classes control the discourses that set up the boundaries that define the "low other" (Allen, 1991:26). For Allen, burlesque dancers took these images of the "low other" and inverted them so that the power of the ruling classes to define culture was exposed. Burlesque performances questioned the ruling classes' efforts to make their cultural tastes seem natural and legitimate. He notes that burlesque dancers within their presentation of the "low other" created a satire of the cultural, political, social aspects of society. By turning things inside out and up side down, burlesque dancers were acting out the cultural contradictions and social inequalities that existed within culture (Allen, 1991:27, 146-147).

Allen's analysis of burlesque theatre and American culture can be used to show that middle class moral reform groups in London at the turn of the century had similar reactions to working class culture as the American ruling classes. Valverde's ideas on

class formation and the protection of cultural tastes in Canada, can be used to explain reformers' efforts in London were aimed at preserving their middle class cultural interests through the regulation of working class entertainment.

Moral panics

According to social historians and professors of law, the 1880s through to the 1920s was a period of "moral panic." Jeffery Weeks (1981) argues that during this time, moral panic and fear spread very rapidly in Britain from one community to another. These fears were dealt with by displacing them onto "Folk Devils," who were members of a socially deviant group that lived on the margins of society (Weeks, 1981:14-15). Moral panics in Ontario during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Dubinsky suggests, were caused by dramatic shifts in the economy and changes in race and gender relations. These changes produced dramatic social tensions which were transformed by moral reform groups into social and moral crises of sexuality (Dubinsky, 1993:35). As Valverde (1991) notes, moral panics in Canada were often constructed in what she refers to as a "Machiavellian plan" to heighten and legitimate the power of moral reform groups and state agencies. She suggests that several large scale panics were organized in Canada during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century around a wide range of moral issues such as: abortion, infanticide, white slavery and prostitution. A moral panic, commonly assumed the form of a threat, disguised and concealed to hide the real problems or forms of danger. For Valverde, moral panics were effective when they convinced people there was a social problem that needed to be addressed. For example, the white slavery panic appeared to be based on the threat that young white Canadian women were being kidnapped by strangers and forced to work as prostitutes in foreign lands. Despite the fact

that very little evidence was uncovered to support these fears, Canadian citizens believed them to be true and the panic was a success (Valverde, 1991:103).

Moral panics were used by moral reform groups in Canada during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century for several reasons. Valverde (1991:103) asserts that middle class moral reformers used moral panics to win over community support for their moral views and regulatory aims. In Toronto, at the turn of the century, Strange (1995) suggests that reformers attempted to convince people that the sexual morality of wage-earning women who worked in factories were at risk. Boisterous wage-earning women were blamed for most of the urban social problems, such as prostitution, that were perceived as plaguing society (Strange, 1995:118). Reformers, however, never collected enough concrete evidence, such as personal confessions or criminal charges, to prove that factory women occasionally sold or traded their sexual services for a night out on the town. Nor were they able to find any male factory workers who admitted to buying sexual favors from wage-earning women. The reformers' reports were based solely on gossip, rumour and speculation. As a result, the information and allegations contained in the reformers reports, served to legitimate their agenda to discipline and control "unruly" women (Strange, 1995:121).

Moral panics were also used by reform groups in Canada to punish women who publicly defied male power and questioned men's right to control them. In a study of women and the law in nineteenth century Canada, Constance Backhouse (1991) focuses on the ways that women were punished by the law during times of moral panic. She asserts that even when male offenders were prosecuted by the law, young wage-earning women still paid a higher price. Lawyers' tactics and public shame ruined the reputations of women involved in criminal trials. The morality of the female victims often became the focus of the trial, not the crime that had been committed. She suggests that upper and

middle class families rarely brought criminal charges against men for seducing their young daughters, especially when the daughters had been dating their male seducers. Fathers were fearful that their family name or reputation would be dishonored by going public with the crime, which could result in financial ruin (1991:56-57).

Valverde's analysis of how moral panics were used by reformers in Canada, can be used to show the similar ways moral panics were employed by reform groups in London at the turn of the century. Her ideas can be used to highlight the ways that London reformers used moral panics to gain community support for the regulation of burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women. Backhouse's analysis of moral panics can also be used to reveal the ways that the law was used by reformers in London to punish these women.

Moral regulation

Valverde's (1994) use of the term moral regulation refers to regulatory processes that were started by reform groups, social purists and philanthropists rather than state-sponsored agencies. For Valverde (1991:167) moral regulation is very diverse because it involves social, political and economic factors. Thus, the distinction between the different areas of regulation (economic, social, moral) was not easily determined; moral regulation became a way of governing and informing all social relations in the private and the public arenas. Every social, political and economic issue or problem was thought of as moral by reformers at the turn of the century in Canada.

Several theorists analyzed how discourses have become naturalized or normalized (Valverde, 1991; Corrigan and Sayer. 1985; Foucault, 1979; Gramsci, 1971). Foucault's conceptualization of normalization is used to explain this process. According to Foucault (1979), the "normal" is an ideological construction which is established in an effort to

organize, standardize and constitute knowledge and individual behaviour. Normalization requires homogeneity or compliance by the individual. He notes that normalization has the power to individualize by highlighting the differences that exist between individuals and norms. These differences or abnormalities can be measured or ranked according to their deviation from the norm. For Foucault, "it is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish." It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them (Foucault, 1979:184). Normalization, is not just the way that individuals think that they know the essence of things or even their representations, but it is the process where the "knowledge is transformed into political investment" (Foucault, 1979:185).

The moral reform movement created the image of the "moral delinquent" as a way to justify and legitimate their moral views and regulatory practices. Reformers' desire to secure and maintain their own middle class interests were hidden behind a mask of morality and a campaign that was "designed" to protect single wage-earning women from sexual immorality. The rhetoric of reform, however, did more to produce female delinquents than it did to protect them from sexual danger, which was their stated goal. Both burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women were a topic of concern for moral reformers at the turn of the century. These women became the targets of moral reform because their behaviour publicly defied socially accepted ways that women could act. Burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women rejected their assumed roles as wives and mothers, however, in very different ways. Burlesque dancers used their excessive displays of sexuality and femininity to unsettle and subvert prescribed moral codes of gender, sexuality and public decency. Female dancers were morally dangerous because they inverted the category of moral delinquent and thereby exposed moral reform's efforts for what they really were. Single wage-earning women challenged gender norms through

their waged labour. Reformers were threatened by the economic independence and social autonomy that these women gained through paid employment and were fearful that these gains would challenge male power and authority over women. Burlesque dancers also gained economic independence through their waged labour; however, they did not gain the social independence other wage-earning women did. Female dancers were controlled by their male managers and show directors who lived and travelled with these women in their burlesque troupes.

Chapter Two: Methodology

A qualitative social-historical approach was used to identify the links between moral reform and the development of the burlesque industry in London from 1885 to 1917. Historical sociology seeks to explain and understand the past in terms of sociological models and theories (Neuman, 1994:383). Like field research, it tries to "see through the eyes of those being studied" by reconstructing their lives and the systems they lived in (Neuman, 1994:375). Unlike quantitative research designs, no "mechanical recipes" (Skocpol, 1984) or specific methodological procedures are followed for historical analysis. A multi-method approach (Valverde, 1994; Strange, 1995) employing discourse analysis, literary theory and feminist criticism was used to read and deconstruct primary and secondary texts. This study closely follows Valverde (1994) who argues that social historians cannot simply gather facts on the past by merely looking at records, because facts and people are both "generated and given meaning in discourse." Acknowledging the "role of discourses, symbolic systems and texts in actively organizing both social relations and people's feelings" is critical to understanding the past (Valverde, 1994:9), and it is the goal of this research.

The present study reveals how particular discourses of the moral reform movement were created and how these moral discourses were used to control burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women. In order to analyze the effects moral reform had on burlesque in London, it is important to highlight the underlying factors that facilitated reformers' regulatory goals.

Forms of data and data collection procedures

Multiple forms of data were used to gather information on burlesque dancers, single wage-earning women and moral reform groups in London at the turn of the century. Newspapers, journals, primary and secondary books, census reports, city council minutes, court and jail records, personal scrapbooks and letters, philanthropic society reports and theatre programs.

Data collection was conducted simultaneously with data recording and data analysis procedures. Voluminous amounts of textual information were consulted, sorted into categories, deconstructed, and analyzed to create a "consolidated picture" (Tesch, 1990:97) or qualitative text. A journal or audit trail was kept to record decisions made in the research process in order to prevent "leaps of interpretative logic" (Kirk and Miller, 1986) and to allow other researchers to see how various theoretical concepts were reached.

Data Collection was guided by the following questions: "Did burlesque exist in London during the period of 1885 to 1917?", "How frequent were the shows?" "Where were they performed?", "What influence did moral reform groups have on this industry?" On my first visit to Regional room I met the director John Lutman. I provided him with a brief description of the thesis topic including a definition of what I meant by "burlesque." He referred me to the Carthy Arthur and Edmund Theatre collection, the Grand Theatre collection and the London Theatre collection. These primary documents contained valuable information on various local theatres; however, they did not provide a list or chronological history of all theatres that were operating in London during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

A list of local theatres, saloons, music halls and outdoor entertainment establishments from 1885 to 1917 was created by scanning city directories. The listings

for each theatrical establishment was traced and a brief history was created recording their years of operation. Information found in these directories was used to uncover popular entertainment locations and theatre districts. Directories were also used to determine if London had a designated "burlesque house" like the ones found in Toronto, Hamilton, Ottawa, Kingston. London, at the turn of the century, had a reputation for being a "thriving cultural centre" (Brown, 1990; Fraser, 1988; Goodspeed, 1889).

To uncover information on the smaller London theatres and performance halls, several primary and secondary sources were consulted: Orlo Miller (1964) "Old Opera Houses of Western Ontario," Opera Canada (Regional Collections), Herman Goodden (1993) *Curtain Rising: The History of Theatre in London, The London Free Press, The London Advertiser*. If London had a "booming entertainment industry" it would have needed the theatrical facilities to attract and accommodate imported touring companies. The size, architecture and adaptability of each theatre was important to this study for the following reasons. The size and architecture of local theatres signified the investment owners were putting into the industry. Large and elaborate structures suggested that London residents were serious about the theatre and their emulation of foreign stages. The atmosphere of each building was an indicator of the class of patrons that owners were trying to attract the type of shows it was equipped to present to audiences.

Theatre owners and lessees played a significant role in the success of the commercial amusement industry in London. The names of owners and managers were found in the Carthy Arthur and Edmund Theatre Collection (box 4919), Grand Theatre Programmes (box 4538, 4540, 4541), London Theatre (box 5008). Names of managers were also printed in *The Business of Theatre* by Alfred Bernheim (1932). The number of theatres or chains that each proprietor owned and operated in Ontario and the United States was

included. The theatre circuit or syndicate in which each manager belonged and the connections between Canadian and American professional touring groups were presented.

The names of touring theatrical companies and their owners were listed in the playbills located in the theatre collections. The purpose of these bills was to advertise local performances. They were printed weekly and provided brief descriptions of the show, a list of cast names or number of performers, show times and prices, as well as famous theatres in large urban centres in which the act had been performed. Guides were written by the show owner or manager. Each guide provided a summary or breakdown of the overall act, including intermission, extravaganza and special features.

Information about the type of people that went to local theatres was gathered using officially collected demographic data on the city of London between 1885 and 1917. Population lists (Brock, 1980), Canadian census reports and the *History of Middlesex County* (Goodspeed & Goodspeed, 1889) were compared and contrasted to discover the sex, class, race, growth rate and wealth per capita for the city of London. Population and growth rate statistical data were collected to determine if London was large enough to attract and support imported touring companies and local amateur theatre groups. The ethnicity of area residents was investigated because it had a significant impact on the type of shows presented on local stages.

The cultural tastes and social character of London residents were documented in Charles Hutchinson's Papers and Scrapbook ⁶ located in the Regional Room.⁷ This

⁶ Charles Hutchinson served as the crown attorney from 1858 to 1892. He was also the Clerk of the Peace for Middlesex County, and senior partner of the law firm Hutchinson and McKillop. Hutchinson was a prominent member and layman for the Church of England. He was known for his puritanical outlook and was famous for writing letters to the *Advertiser* requesting that wine be no longer used for communion, as it could lead to addiction.

⁷ The Regional Room is located in the D.B. Weldon library at the University of Western

collection focused on nonwhite collar London citizens. The papers or letterbooks consisted of handwritten notes that Hutchinson had made acting in his role as crown attorney for Middlesex County. Personal letters he received from friends, politicians, community members were included. Since the handwriting in some letters was poor and the ink smeared, most were very difficult to read and were not used in this study. The scrapbook contained notes and clippings of major social, political, cultural events including local high profile criminal cases. Obscure or unfavorable incidents, often omitted from or buried within unkept minutebooks, government created documents, criminal court records were included. Court transcripts of the Davene trial were examined to discover the dominant moral outlook of London residents during the late nineteenth century, the power of the moral views of reform groups within the community and to locate the names of reform leaders and active group members.

The moral discourses and activities of London residents were also represented by another group closely linked to the Church of England: the London District Women's Christian Temperance Union. The records of this women's group were scattered and incomplete. It is clear that these women did not realize the importance of keeping organized records of their annual reports or meetings. The majority of these records and minutebooks of this philanthropic group were destroyed in a fire in 1981; however, a duplicate copy was available on microfilm. The documents were examined and major reform issues were recorded.

Additional information on moral reform activities in London was collected using Joan Kennedy's unpublished master's thesis, "The London Local Council of Women and

Ontario. This room holds the most extensive local history collection for the London and surrounding area. This regional collection also contains numerous rare books and documents that explore various aspects of London's history. The majority of information used in this research was found in this collection.

Harriet Boomer" (1989), which contained names of local reform groups, and active members. Kennedy's work was used to document the main reform concerns for London residents during the period of 1887 to 1917 and the efforts they used to eradicate what they perceived to be "immoral" and "criminal" behaviour.

Moral reformers' perceptions of immorality and vice were then compared to "officially" collected crime statistics in order to obtain a clearer picture of the dominant moral discourses and activities in London. Crime rates for the period of 1885 to 1917 were collected from numerous sources: *County of Middlesex, General Register for the County of Middlesex for the Gaol*, 1885 to 1917, Middlesex jail records, 1885 to 1917, the *Register of the jail for the Gaol at London*,⁸ and the Charles Hutchinson Collection. Statistics were stratified into categories of sex, race, religion, occupation for each offender and the type of crime they committed. Data was compared and contrasted to look for any major discrepancies and to uncover trends in local crime rates.

London by-laws regarding commercial entertainment establishments were consulted. The by-law, "Regulation of Taverns and other Public Entertainment within the City of London, Relating to Tavern Licenses (no.1134)" listed the rules applied to granting permits. The names of government appointed license inspectors who issued these forms was found in City Council minutes. The minutes from 1885 to 1917 also provided the names of theatrical companies or performers that were issued permits to perform in local establishments, Western fair side-shows, or special events. Minutes included annual auditor reports, which contained records of disbursements the city received from the Western Fair for the rental of booths, license fees and special privileges. Income from

⁸ London's gaol had a very diverse population. The gaol served as a poorhouse, a detoxification centre, a home for the mentally ill and a minimum and maximum security prison.

theatre and tavern licenses was also listed. The names of the inspectors was cross-referenced with names of reform members to determine if there were any connections.⁹

Newspapers

Primary data was collected from *The London Advertiser*, *The London Free Press*, *Toronto Mail*, and the *New York Times*. Newspapers were a valuable resource for this study because they provided detailed accounts of local scandals involving burlesque dancers and moral reformers that had not been documented elsewhere. Newspapers written in the language of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, provided a clear picture of local residents and reform members' reactions to burlesque dancers, especially in the editorial column. The materials presented in London papers between 1885 to 1917 included: advertisements, press releases, theatre reviews, letters to the editor. Each paper provided information regarding who played what, where and when.

*The London Advertiser*¹⁰ was issued every Monday on a weekly basis from 1885 to 1917. This paper was commonly referred to as the "court of last resort" or the "organ of reform," (Webster, 1992) because it tended to represent the concerns of the local moral majority. Complaints from moral reformers such as clergymen addressing problems of social and moral reform were often printed. Special attention was given to the

⁹ Inspector Murray, an O.P.P officer investigating crime and vice on the railway, put together his first hand observations in a book entitled *The Great Detective*. This book contained short stories of criminal activity and local scandals associated with the railway.

¹⁰ The first edition of the *Advertiser* was printed on October 27, 1863. John. A. Cameron founded the paper. He became the president of the Canadian Press Association in 1872. Cameron was a solid supporter of social and moral reform. In 1882, Cameron was replaced by David Mills as editor in 1882.

entertainment section for advertisements of local performances, job advertisements for the theatre industry and the editorial column. The format of the *Advertiser* changed in 1907. A new column in the entertainment section appeared, entitled "Plays, Players and Playgoers," which described nightly theatre productions. Reviews were not critical or evaluative, but rather they provided straight forward eyewitness accounts of show details, audience sizes and reactions. Press releases were collected and dealt with very cautiously. Information printed in these publicity releases were put together by show managers and were often disguised as regular articles. These articles exaggerated the talents of the performers and were only used to provide information on the type of act and the specialty of each dancer.

The *London Free Press* had a very different focus than the *Advertiser*. This paper did not print articles that reported moral reformers' concerns and solutions to social and moral vices. The *Free Press* was also issued weekly from 1885 to 1917. Information obtained from each London paper was compared to verify facts and to supplement missing information.

The *Toronto Mail* was consulted only when travelling burlesque shows were involved in a local scandal or were the subject of numerous complaints from outraged citizens. Papers were examined one month prior and one month after the London incident occurred to determine if a similar event took place somewhere else. The *New York Times* was used to confirm show managers' and operators' claims that they actually performed in New York theatres, and to examine any reviews that existed. Information presented on burlesque troupes in the *New York Times* were compared to London papers in order to verify facts.

Data recording procedures

The process of data recording was based on what Marshall and Rossman (1988:114) refer to as "data reduction" and "interpretation." Archival information was consulted to "generate categories, themes, or patterns" about the burlesque industry. Categorization involved "segmenting" the information (Tesch, 1990) and developing "coding categories" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Primary and secondary material was sorted and coded separately. The recording process was guided by the question, "Did the moral reform movement influence the development of burlesque in London?" Three kinds of qualitative coding was used: open coding, axial coding, selective coding (Neuman, 1994:407).

In open coding primary and secondary documents were scanned to create a list of key terms, themes and names of performers. All information was sorted by category or theme and placed in a separate file folder. Following Miles and Hubberman's (1984:56) recommendation, I made a list of terms prior to reading the archival texts. The key words and categories included burlesque, hoochy-koochy dancer, salome dancer, girlie show. The first review of Grand Theatre programmes and newspaper reviews was unsuccessful; none of these terms were found. Theatre programmes were reread to find recurring themes or trends in burlesque performances. Detailed analytic notes were made for each code containing ideas about the data and the coding process. Each memo entry was dated to facilitate later integration and analysis.

In axial coding documents were re-examined to determine the connections and conceptual links among themes discovered in open coding. Concepts were divided into subcategories, in order to identify "causes, consequences, conditions and interactions, strategies and processes" (Neuman, 1984:408). Concepts that clustered around burlesque were expanded to include vaudeville, variety theatre, extravaganza, illegitimate theatre,

legitimate theatre, concert saloon, music halls, taverns, special feature, living picture or statuary, high-class performer, aerial acts, the western fair, Charles Hatch shows, chorus girls, moral reform, women's Christian Council, old boys' reunions, Police Chief Williams, policing and the railway.¹¹ Each of these concepts was examined in greater depth in the selective coding phase.

In selective coding, after all of the data was collected from the diverse archival sources, documents were selectively scanned for recurrent patterns, behaviors, or scandals involving burlesque dancers and moral reformers' reactions to them. Theatre programs from the Grand Theatre, Park Theatre, Bennett's Theatre, Patricia Theatre, Majestic Theatre, Star Theatre, which advertised burlesque performances, were cross-referenced with the *London Free Press* and the *London Advertiser* to confirm if shows actually occurred.

Internal and external criticism

Neuman (1994:387) suggests that all documents found in archives must be subjected to "external and internal" criticism. Several techniques were utilized to ensure external and internal criticism in this study. Primary documents may have been incomplete, unorganized and in various stages of decay. All primary and secondary material used in this research was divided into groups based on its source, its author and its point of view. The "transferability" of each text was tested using the following questions: "Who was the

¹¹ The railway was included in the list of terms because it was used as the primary source of transportation for travelling burlesque troupes at the turn of the century in Ontario. London was part of the Grand Trunk Railway Line which was connected to major American cities such as Detroit and Buffalo. The railway brought foreign burlesque troupes into London theatres. For a detailed discussion of the railway and the theatre see Kathleen Fraser, (1988), *London's Grand: An Opera House on the Michigan-Ohio-Canadian Circuit, 1881-1914*.

author of the text?", "Why was the document created?", "Was the purpose of the article to make news, to present policy, or to present new ideas?", "How did the document survive?"

Internal criticism was controlled by separating documents that were created by an author who witnessed or experienced the event first-hand, from those that were based on second-hand accounts. The way historical facts are "constituted, collected and publicized" is just as revealing as the information within these social facts (Valverde and Weir, 1988:32). Regulatory discourses were examined from the "perspective of their production and circulation." Analytic notes were used to record this information in order to ensure that any other researcher interested in the transferability of all or parts of this study has a detailed framework for comparison. Primary and secondary texts were compared and contrasted in order to detect inaccurate historical data or false statements. Knowing how the data were collected is the best way to determine the authenticity and accuracy of the texts. Theatre programs were cross-referenced with newspaper advertisements, show reviews, letters to the editor, Canadian White Ribbon Tidings from 1905 to 1917,¹² London City Council minutes from 1885 to 1917 and Ministerial Alliance minutes.¹³

To check for inconsistencies, absences, or incongruities in newspapers and primary documents I looked for "negative evidence" or "what was not in the data" (Neuman,

¹² The Canadian White Ribbon Tidings was a collection of articles, letters and reviews of Christian Women's issues and concerns in Canada at the turn of the century. Issues that were addressed in these collections ranged from the medical hazards of venereal disease to the best techniques used to ration food. These books were published on a yearly basis starting in 1905.

¹³ The Ministerial Alliance was a group of London's clergy members from various christian denominations. This group joined together out of their concern for immorality and vice in local theatres and entertainment districts. A detailed analysis of the Alliance is provided in chapter four.

1994:419). Scanning for missing information provided invaluable insights. Why did reporters never interview the dancers themselves? Why were working class women's voices always missing from the archival documents consulted? What type of burlesque shows were more likely to be reported for their "immoral" conduct than others? Disconfirming or negative evidence was sought in order to revise, reshape and reconfirm all hypotheses.

Newspapers

Various steps were taken to ensure the credibility and dependability of information collected in newspaper reports. Franzosi (1987:7) suggests that newspaper reports may be accepted as data that an event did occur; however, the absence of such reports may not be an indication that an event did not occur. He argues that the most common type of "bias" to occur in newspapers consists more of silence than outright false information. By using the press as a source of historical data the researcher is taking the risk of collecting "insufficient" rather than faulty information (Franzosi,1987:7). Insufficient information was a common problem throughout this research when comparing material reported in the *London Free Press* with the *London Advertiser*. Both papers had a very different focus and were writing for a different audience.

To overcome this problem with internal and external criticism, parallel data collection methods were conducted (Franzosi, 1987:10). All information found in the *London Advertiser* referring to the burlesque industry or moral reform were compared with that presented in the *London Free Press*. The goal was to uncover any recording error that could threaten the credibility of the study. Franzosi argues that researchers cannot do anything to change the degree of recording error; however, they can measure the extent (1987:10).

In the following chapter the early stages of the burlesque industry in London during the period of 1885 to 1917 are explored. The divisions which separated middle class from working class theatrical genres and placed them into a hierarchy from low to high art, from respectable to unrespectable are examined. Moral reformers' roles in constructing and maintaining class distinctions within the theatre are discussed. The regulatory aims and practices reformers used to censor and modify burlesque shows are presented.

Chapter Three

Women Dancers: The Early Stages of Burlesque

By 1896, Ontario was recovering from a long depression and entering into a period of economic renewal and prosperity. Urban centres throughout the province were being transformed by the introduction of industrialization and wage-labour. As a result of such changes, streams of rural citizens were flooding into Ontario cities in search of paid employment and economic advancement. These dramatic changes in Ontario's social and economic climate created an atmosphere that allowed the theatre to flourish.

London, Ontario was one of these newly expanding industrial cities. Situated at the fork of the Thames river, London was accessible by water, land and railway. Ferries, steamers, stagecoaches and trains departed from the city on a daily basis. London was part of the Grand Trunk Railway Line which gave the city a direct route to the United States, in particular Detroit and Buffalo, and to major Canadian centres in Ontario and Quebec. The railway made London accessible to travelling American and British entertainment troupes and their touring international stars by providing a quick, reliable, year-round method of transportation (Frazer, 1988:134).

London became an environment in which the legitimate as well as the illegitimate theatre began to thrive. Between 1880 and 1900 the population of London doubled from 20,000 to 40,000 (Brock, 1980). The popularity of the theatre also doubled, as numerous London theatres drew large crowds on a nightly basis (Fraser, 1988:140). London and area residents had a great enthusiasm for the theatre because it offered prompt and easy relief from the routine of working in a factory, department store, or workshop. The

upswing in the economy gave working and middle class patrons the confidence to spend their money on the various pleasure-seeking pursuits that London theatres had to offer.

Burlesque at the turn of the century

Variety shows, comedies, and melodramas were common at London's theatres, music halls and concert saloons around 1900. These shows included such popular musical comedies as *The Ziegfeld Follies* and the *Blonde Typewriters*, which stirred the audiences with their singing, dancing, and above all, with their tight-fitting costumes. By the end of the nineteenth century London was a thriving theatrical centre which attracted numerous "big shows" with "all star casts," who often performed within months of their original appearances in New York or Chicago. To understand the burlesque industry in London during this period, it is necessary to examine how the theatre worked, the numerous divisions within it and the groups that were involved in making the distinctions between the shows that appeared on the legitimate and the illegitimate stage. Only then can attention be focused on the wage-earning women who worked in the burlesque industry.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century moral reformers had a significant influence on local theatre. The views of reformers were constantly being challenged by theatre managers, show operators and burlesque dancers. The theatre had become a site of conflict when moral, social and economic interests were in competition. Moral reformers were competing with theatre managers, show operators and burlesque dancers for acceptance and legitimacy from the working classes. Reformers wanted the working class to adopt the reform's middle class notions of culture, morality and respectability. At the same time, however, the working class demanded to see more light-hearted, easy to understand shows that resembled features of their everyday life. They did not want to see operas or the serious dramas with their poetic language that was

difficult to understand. Reformers rejected the illegitimate theatre since it reflected the "uncultured" lifestyles of the working class (Lenton, 1991:186-196).

Social and community censorship was a powerful force in shaping the content of the shows that were imported into London theatres. London was a city known for its conservative nature and profound moral climate. Up to the twentieth century, numerous puritanical religious groups¹⁴ were opposed to all forms of theatre since they believed that the theatre was fundamentally improper and immoral. Moral reform groups, philanthropists and clergy members viewed the theatre as an arena where they could impose their middle class morals, values and cultural tastes upon the needy working classes (Armstrong, 1992:189-190).

Performers and circuit managers were expected to follow the strict moral codes and standards of behaviour that reformers had set out for them, both on and off stage. Violation of these moral codes and values would lead to censorship. Shows that did not follow these rules were usually shut down by police when they received several complaints about "unclean" and "risqué" performances. On numerous occasions London moral reform groups were successful in closing down shows that they found to have "immoral" content (Armstrong, 1992:175-182).

In fact, reformers were so sensitive to topics they found questionable that they forced touring companies to cancel their shows even when they found the subject, not the performance itself, morally offensive. For example, in 1916 the travelling production *Damaged Goods* was cancelled after London reform groups pressured local theatre owners. Reformers objected to the show because it presented the devastating side-effects of contracting venereal disease. Ironically, the show was performed several days later in

¹⁴ Until 1914, the "Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Church of Canada" prohibited theatre attendance.

the nearby town of St. Thomas, where the theatre owner provided transportation to all London residents who wanted to see the show (*London Free Press*, February 19, 1916, p.2).

Theatre managers and show operators were driven by their desire to make money and to keep both burlesque dancers and moral reform groups happy so that they could keep their theatres open. Moral reformers worked very hard at demarcating the boundaries between the legitimate and illegitimate stage. Several techniques were used by theatre managers, show operators and burlesque dancers to blur the distinctions that moral reformers created to separate performances that took place on the legitimate and the illegitimate stage. The working classes were able to see the contradictions that existed between their tastes and those of the middle class. They were also conscious of reformers' efforts to impose their cultural tastes upon them, evidenced by the working classes' refusal to give up forms of entertainment they found pleasurable and by the continued popularity of illegitimate shows.

When burlesque dancers were on the legitimate stage in London, their shows usually went uncensored.¹⁵ In London, for example, a group of burlesque dancers, who called themselves the *Blonde Typewriter Troupe*, advertised their show as a clean "novelty act" which easily escaped the censorship of moral reformers. In the *London Advertiser* (October 15, 1907), the reviewer notes "this is a novelty act of no mean merit. The six girls are pretty, they can sing, they can dance. What little acting is required is done well." What the reporter is really saying is that the show had a very thin plot, lacked any sense of

¹⁵ Legitimate theatres were also not being censored in Toronto during this period. The battle between the morality department of the police force and theatres is presented in the *Toronto Star*, January 9, 29, February 27, 1909.

drama, and did not belong in the legitimate theatre (*London Advertiser*, October 15, 1907, p.6).

Legitimate theatres

The Grand Opera House was London's first and longest running legitimate theatre. At its peak in the 1890's, the Grand had been host to 250 travelling theatre companies and 300 performances annually. Destroyed by fire in 1900, it was quickly rebuilt and reopened on September 8, 1901. The new Grand was the largest theatre to be built in Canada until the completion of the Toronto Alexandra in 1907. With the capacity to seat 1,850 patrons, the Grand was a sophisticated, well-equipped theatre that could accommodate almost any type of travelling show (Fairfield, 1990: 235; Fraser, 1988:140; Goodden, 1993).

Theatrical productions ranged from *Twelfth Night*, *Faust* and *Romeo and Juliet* to classical music recitals. Professional or high class acting troupes usually from Britain or the United States presented skillful performances to London audiences (Grand Theatre Programmes, 1885-1917). Legitimate theatre in London attracted educated middle and upper class patrons, who usually had some knowledge of the theatre and the dramas that were being presented (Fraser, 1988:125-127).

At the end of the nineteenth century the demand for legitimate theatre was quickly dwindling. By 1914 only 124 touring companies were on the road in Ontario (Fraser, 1988:140). The decrease in travelling shows left Ontario theatre owners with fewer acts to book in their newly expanded theatres. Out of desperation, legitimate theatre owners and managers were forced to book almost any road attraction of "good taste" that they could find in order to keep their establishments open. The only other alternative they had was to convert the theatre into a movie house which would cost thousands of dollars.

Presenting variety shows had its advantages because they were cheaper to produce, and they appealed to a larger segment of the population. At this point high class burlesque made its way onto the legitimate stage, usually as a closing act for a "respectable musical or comedy show" (Lenton, 1983:82-83).

During the period of 1885 to 1917 London theatre-goers saw their share of high class burlesque shows. *The Castle Square Stock Company*, for example, presented the "comic drama," "A Runaway Wife," at the London Opera House, November 19 and 20, 1912. At the end of this show the special feature "Ermani the Dainty Dancer"¹⁶ was added which theatre owners claimed cost them an extra \$200 per week. Ermani's act consisted of the "dance of all nations, L'Etoile de nuit, La Dance du Vesuvius, the Chameleon and the Butterfly dance, and Lily of the Nile." It is difficult to determine how her performance was connected to the main production, or if she was even a part of this company. At the bottom of the Opera House playbill it stated "Ermani will positively appear at every performance.....which will follow immediately after the last act, for which the audience is required to kindly keep in their seats" (London Theatre Collection, RC box 4008).

Illegitimate theatres

By the turn of the century burlesque and other variety performances were quite easy to find in London theatres. Nightly productions were advertised in the entertainment section of the *London Free Press* and the *London Advertiser*. Copies of playbills were also posted in local saloons, taverns and store windows. The illegitimate theatre was so popular that on any given night London residents had several different stages from which to choose. Prior to 1900, London residents went to the Park Theatre, People's Theatre, or

¹⁶ Refer to Appendix B for copy of Playbill

the Holmon Opera House to see a variety show. After 1900, they were also attending Bennett's Theatre, which later became the Majestic Theatre, the Star Theatre and the Patricia Theatre (Goodden, 1993; Fuller, 1966).

Illegitimate theatre, commonly referred to as variety theatre, presented fast-paced, well mixed musical and comic performances that provided something for every audience member. This type of theatre was very popular with working class men and women in London since it gave the audiences a type of light-hearted entertainment that did not require an previous knowledge or education to understand it. Variety theatre in London was also very affordable; admission prices ranged from ten to fifty cents for evening show and matinees. In contrast, "first-class" theatre prices went from twenty-five cents to a dollar-fifty (London Theatre Collection, RC box 5008).

Burlesque acts and variety road shows were very difficult for theatre managers or booking agents to find because burlesque circuits or wheels were not officially formed until the turn of the century. Prior to the twentieth century theatres commonly installed their own resident stock companies. Included in each stock company was a chorus of dancing girls who performed between acts or at the end of the shows (Lenton, 1991:196). It is quite possible that in times of desperation, London theatre managers went to the various local brothels and recruited some prostitutes to become dancers in their chorus lines. Reporters working for the *London Free Press* and the *London Advertiser* quite often made subtle hints about these recruiting techniques. Esther Forsyth Arscott, for example, was a very rich "madam," who successfully owned and operated several houses of ill-fame in London during this period (Backhouse, 1991:224). Given her reputation as a shrewd business woman and her keen knowledge of the law, Arscott could have easily supplied local theatres, if the price was right.

London theatres were owned and controlled by American circuit managers. C.W. Bennett, C.J. Whitney, E.D. Stair, and Ambrose Small owned theatre chains that linked London to outside stages across Ontario and into the United States. With their head offices in Detroit, theatre owners could travel to the big cities (particularly New York and Chicago) to recruit performers and dance troupes which they used to put together road shows to supply their theatre franchises (Lenton, 1983:96; *London Advertiser*, October 15, 1907). London theatre managers or booking agents often advertised in the *New York Dramatic Mirror* for entertainment troupes who were willing to play in London theatres (Brown, 1991:128; *London Advertiser*, October 15, 1907).

The majority of burlesque troupes that performed in London during this period were from the United States. American burlesque dancers and their managers played a key role in the direction that burlesque was taking during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by introducing many new dances and trends onto the legitimate and the illegitimate stage. For example, Grace Akis, an American born burlesque dancer, was famous for being the first person to bring "living pictures" to Ontario. In her performance, *The Girl With Auburn Hair*, dancers wore tight and revealing body stockings and posed as living statues of classical subjects (Lenton, 1983:212). This form of burlesque was very popular with London audiences, evidenced by the frequency with which living picture acts from the United States performed at the Grand Theatre and other local performance halls during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (London Theatre Collection, box 4919, box 5008).

Another dance trend that was introduced to the burlesque industry by American dancers was the Salome dance or the Dance of Seven Veils. This dance began in Britain, however, Gertrude Hoffman was sent overseas by Willie Hammerstein to learn the dance and bring it back to American audiences. Hoffman brought her Salome dance to Ontario

stages in 1909, after having broke all records for being the longest running burlesque act in New York (Cherniavsky, 1991; Lenton, 1983:351; *New York Times*, July 14 and September 3, 1908).

Deception in the theatre

Variety theatres rarely presented burlesque dancers as their feature act during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, because this type of entertainment was considered to be for men only. Theatre managers wanted to attract larger audiences of both male and female patrons, so they often downplayed burlesque shows by placing them within the mix of variety acts, juggling acts and magic shows. Burlesque remained popular with the working class audiences (Lenton, 1990:184-185, Grand Theatre Collection, box 4538, 4541, 4540). London theatre managers used several techniques to blur the distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate shows.

Theatre managers often deceived their patrons by writing lengthy descriptions of their shows in order to convince potential audience members that the shows were appropriate. Words like clean, wholesome, refined, professional, family entertainment were used to lure in unsuspecting patrons. In 1892, the *Guy Brothers Minstrels* performed at the Opera house and before the show, an article was posted around town giving "the reasons why the *Guy Brothers Minstrels* have success,

The show is good. It is refined. They don't deceive. This is no humbug. The orchestra is superb. The acrobats are wonderful. Ladies can attend. They do as advertised. The parade is fine. They are clever. The dancing is great. The singing is excellent (Grand Theatre Programmes, box 4538, November 23, 1892).

Burlesque dancers used similar techniques to pass through the moral screen that London reformers used to keep immoral shows out. One of the most common tricks used by burlesque performers' was to disassociate themselves from the variety label completely. Burlesque dancers often changed the name of their act by using their professional or legal name in an attempt to sound more legitimate and respectable (Lenton, 1990:185). For example, acts like *Paris Gaiety Girls Big Beautiful Burlesque Dancers* were no longer common because theatre owners did not want to book shows with such revealing names. By changing their names to things like "Mme.Rentz-Santley Company" they separated themselves from the burlesque label and were able to travel free from reformer interference or disapproval.

Another technique burlesque dancers used to escape censorship from moral reformers and community members was to refer to their acts as "troupes" or "companies" in order to shed the negative image associated with the "girlie show" or the "leg-variety" label. Unlike the name, the entertainment did not change. Female dancers continued to shock and stimulate audiences with their scanty costumes and gyrating hips. The only difference was that they were performing on the legitimate stage to a middle class audience under a new identity (Lenton, 1990:185).

In an effort to deceive reformers and theatre-goers burlesque troupes used the full names of their performers or managers to deceive the public by sounding more legitimate and professional. The *Wilbur Opera Company* (September, 1893), *Castle Square Stock Company* (November 19, 1912), and the *Stoddart Company* (June, 1914) were three of many "companies" that presented burlesque shows within the legitimate theatre in London. Based on their names it would have been very difficult to determine that the *Wilbur Opera Company* was actually a "high art living picture act," or that the *Castle*

Square Stock Company presented the a risqué version of the "dance of all nations" on a nightly basis (Theatre Programmes, RC, 1885-1917).

It was far more socially acceptable for middle-class patrons to attend an evening performance of the *Rose Hill English Folly Company* at the Grand Opera House, than it would be to see *Rose Hill and the Burlesque Dancing Girls* at the Patricia Theatre even though it was the same show using the same performers. The difference was that the act was no longer considered to be a burlesque show; by changing its venue and its name the show was transformed into a "folly" which allowed upper class London patrons to maintain their sense of respectability and moral status within the community without missing the show.

Shows that took place on the legitimate stage quite often escaped censorship from moral reformers because they were thought to present the female form in a "respectable" manner. This did not change even when a "smoking room" was added to the Grand theatre on October 7, 1910 (*London Advertiser*, October 7, 1910, p.6). Reformers actively censored the content of shows occurring in illegitimate theatres where the patrons could smoke and drink. Smoking rooms were commonly associated with working class entertainments and were perceived by reformers as dens of immorality and vice.

Class distinctions existed between what was permissible on the legitimate and the illegitimate stages. Robert Allen (1991) in his study on burlesque and American culture, provides many examples of the double standard that existed within the theatre. Allen refers to Adah Isaacs Menken who achieved fame and fortune for being the first woman to appear in a traditionally male role in *Mazeppa*. In this play, Allen notes, Adah wore a revealing male costume which included a pink body stocking and a tiny sash that barely covered her breasts. Riding horseback galloping up and down a narrow ramp, Adah's scantily clad body-parts became "accidentally" bared for the entire audience to see. This

famous ride, Allen asserts, earned Adah the reputation as the "Naked Lady." Ironically Adah's frontal nudity and physical appearance on-stage was very well received by reformers and community members in the United States (Allen, 1991:96-99). This show, and many others like it, were presented to Ontario audiences during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Since this show was performed in legitimate theatres it never provoked the moral outrage that many burlesque acts performing on illegitimate stages endured. Middle class reformers objected to any type of nudity in illegitimate theatres, however, dramatic plays which were performed in legitimate theatres to high class audiences that contained nudity was considered tasteful.

Regulation of illegitimate shows was so extreme that even the posters which advertised the performances were closely monitored and scrutinized. In 1885, Frank Kerchmer, the manager and owner of *W.M. Davene's Burlesque and Allied Attractions*, was charged with the "promotion of indecent material" by London police. Kerchmer's show was performed at People's Theatre in London during the week of December 28, 1885. The show itself was well liked and was judged by the *London Free Press*, local artistic and theatrical groups and police officials to be a tasteful performance that stayed within the local standards of morality (*London Free Press*, December 29, 1885, p.5). Ironically, it was not the content of the show that reformers objected to but rather the poster that advertised it.

Charles Hutchinson, Crown Attorney for Middlesex County and a devout moral reformer, was outraged by the "immoral, indecent, and risqué" character that was being presented in the Davene poster. The advertisement,¹⁷ entitled "W.M Davene's Allied Attractions," displayed a young woman wearing a circus costume with light pink tights

¹⁷ Refer to Appendix A for a copy of the *W.M Davene's Allied Attractions* Poster.

standing in front of a trapeze bar. Hutchinson objected to the picture since he felt that it "appeal[ed] to the sensual feelings of the young," encouraging immoral and impure thoughts about women (Armstrong, 1993:177). Reverend J.A Murray went beyond Hutchinson's objections to testify that the pictures presented "the female form very much in the state of nudity" (*London Free Press*, January 7, 1886, p.3). Ambrose Powell, the vice president of the liberal party and a well known London entrepreneur, also argued that the Davene poster drew attention to the female dancer's private parts. Thomas McCormick, a wealthy businessman and the owner of a biscuit factory also rejected the poster (Armstrong, 1992:183-184). The only local groups that defended the Davene poster were local artists and theatre groups who argued that the poster was tasteful. The testimony of these local artists and actors hardly proved to be a match against the views of some of the most prominent and highly respected people in London.

The outcome of this trial was that the female dancer, Lotto Davene, was allowed to continue to perform on the stage in a slightly "longer" costume than the one featured in the poster that resulted in the criminal conviction of Kerchmer. On January 25, 1886 Kerchmer was found guilty of distributing indecent material and was fined five dollars with no jail time to be served. Kerchmer immediately appealed, but his appeal was dismissed (*London Free Press*, January 25, 1886, p.3). During the late nineteenth century show managers often altered the advertisements for shows. Theatre owners were very careful in what they allowed performers to do in their theatres out of fear that they would be fined or prosecuted. The social and moral climate of London was a powerful force in controlling what patrons saw on the illegitimate stage.

The western fair

Hootchy-Kootchy dancers performed at the Western Fair in London several times during the period of 1885 to 1917. Shows were frequently presented or advertised at the fair as educational exhibits or displays of "Middle-Eastern Culture" and its styles of dance. Dancing girls were promoted as Turkish or Arabian women who were members of a travelling Middle-Eastern harem. Up until the twentieth century, theatre owners and burlesque dancers went to great lengths to disguise or downplay the sexual display of the female form in their shows. In contrast, "girlie shows" that took place in carnivals, local fairs and farmers' markets did just the opposite. Burlesque dancers or "hootchy-kootchy girls" presented themselves in their side-show performances and specialty acts as exotic creatures driven by their untamed sexual desires. They openly flaunted their bodies and their sexuality for all of their paying customers to see.

Unlike other burlesque performances, their shows had no storylines, plots, choreographed dance routines, or even singing parts. The cooch dancers gyrated their hips back and forth in a sexually suggestive manner in order to arouse and tease their male audience (Strange and Loo, 1995:651; Allen, 1991:227; Aldridge, 1971:569). The cooch dance, the "dance of seven veils," the "fire dance" and the "dance of all nations" began to appear in variety theatres and carnival side-shows in London at the turn of the century. Moral reformers responded by launching an attack against these "morally decrepit shows," reformers believed that the content of such shows provoked a frivolous and potentially evil attitude towards life and that they were harmful to the spectator and the community (*London Free Press*, September 15, 1917, p.2).

In London, cooch dancers were the most highly regulated group of burlesque dancers. Almost every time cooch dancers performed in London side-shows at the Western Fair, moral reformers called upon police to arrest them, close down their shows,

He stayed for one more evening, before making a quick departure on the 5 am train to Brantford Sunday morning (*London Advertiser*, August 14, 1905, p.3).

The *Streets of Cairo* was so popular that on its first day it attracted over 1000 visitors and presented thirteen sold-out shows. Reform groups and clergy members demanded that city officials and police detectives investigate the show and ban women and young boys from buying tickets. Not only did reformers want the dancers to leave town, they wanted to collect evidence to lay criminal charges against the group. While under investigation,¹⁹ Hatch and his performers continued to make huge profits. Market square officials estimated that the show made over five thousand dollars in two days, only seven hundred dollars or fifteen per cent of which went to the Old Boys' organization. The Hatch dancers also made money from the queen of the carnival contest²⁰ by charging five cents for every ballot cast. An additional one-hundred and twenty-five dollars profit was made from this contest (*London Advertiser*, August 14, 1905, p.3). Hatch was charged by London police with "promoting an indecent act." The charges were later dropped by London Magistrate Judd, on the grounds that sufficient evidence was not provided by local police to prove the dancing was "indecent" (*London Advertiser*, September 18, 1917, p.3; Police Court, 1887-1919, X536-538).

Another side-show that attracted unfavorable attention at the Western Fair was the *Garden of Allah*. This Hootchy-Kootchy act was performed for midway audiences during the week of September 10, 1917. Show promoters boldly advertised their style of dance as "red, hot, and spicy." Women and children were barred from the performances by fair

¹⁹ Refer to chapter four for details on this investigation.

²⁰ The Queen of the Carnival was a beauty contest held on an annual basis at the Old Boys' Convention in London. Hatch recommended to the Old Boys' Committee to charge patrons five cents for every ballot cast in the contest. The Old Boys' made enough money to buy a diamond ring for the winner. The Hatch people cleverly swindled money out of London residents and the Old Boys' committee.

officials and show managers. The London Ministerial Alliance was furious that a show of this nature was allowed to be performed at the fair, when only a few weeks before the *Garden of Allah* was closed down at the Toronto exhibition after its first day. The ministers demanded that the show and its female dancers be censored. Certain portions of the show that were "pretty raw" were stopped and cancelled (*London Free Press*, September 14, 1917, p.1).

Reformers' strongly objected to performers who lacked the "proper" Christian and Anglo-Saxon training that they believed was required to build a solid moral character. They particularly objected to carnival side-shows, which expressed and celebrated a casual attitude toward sex by promoting individual pleasure. In the *London Free Press*, Reverend Bingham was reported as stating, "these shows come from a place where there ain't no ten commandments. They are an importation from the decadent [sic] and dissolute [sic] East, which the Western world does not require" (*London Free Press*, September 14, 1917, p.1).

Most women who performed as cooch dancers in side-show attractions such as *Little Egypt*, *The Streets of Cairo*, and *The Garden of Allah*, claimed to be of Middle-Eastern descent, however, this was not always the case. Several of the carnival side-shows which performed at the Western Fair in London were found to be fakes. In fact, in 1895, the directors of the fair discovered that the burlesque dancers who were promoted as "Ladies of the Turkish Palace" were, according to reporters, a "disreputable lot" who they believed were prostitutes gathered up from the streets or a local brothel and put onto the stage. The "Ladies of the Turkish Palace" were a cheap imitation of Arabian dancers, who wore poor fitting long black wigs to try to make their appearances look darker and more exotic. Their dancing "was even more disgusting than their personal appearance." The morning of their performance these so-called "Arabian dancing girls" were given several lessons on

"how to speak the Arabian tongue. All they could master, however, was a weird cry that might have been the bleat of a rocky mountain goat." The show and its performers were ordered by London police to leave town immediately and to never return (*The London Free Press*, September 16, 1895, p.2).

Burlesque as a moral panic

A strong element of distrust toward American and other foreign influences on the theatre in London existed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Reformers were fearful that the attitudes and values of foreign cultures would morally corrupt Ontario residents and their community standards. As a result, the moral standards of some imported shows was called into question. Concerns over American domination resulted in the creation of the British Canadian Theatrical Organization Society. The ultimate goal of this group was to import British touring companies into Ontario in order to overthrow American companies (Scott, 1997:17). Sir John Martin-Harvey was an actor and spokesperson for the group. After a London performance Martin-Harvey made the following comments,

We are not satisfied with the condition of the theatre in Canada. It is too much the mercy of speculative men who send you what they choose and who are not in touch with the Imperial Canadian ideals in the country. You have too many companies which when they come across the line from the south suddenly become all-British and who were very frequently are not; and stars who are one week born in Calgary and the next in Indianapolis" (*London Free Press*, January 26, 1914).

London residents distrusted American influence for many reasons. The primary reason being that the majority of the population of London were white Anglo-Saxon Protestants of British descent (Hutchinson collection; GoodSpeed and Goodspeed, 1889). Most of the theatrical and side-show acts that performed in London were from the United States, local residents disliked them because they were operated by outsiders.

Reformers believed that London residents, particularly single wage-earning women who were "perceived" to be untrained and very gullible about such matters, needed to be protected from the corruption that "foreigners" brought with them. The fear of foreign-born residents quickly turned into a "moral panic." During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the white-slavery panic was at its height in Canada. Moral reformers tried to convince Canadians that their country was neither safe nor morally pure. Reformers avidly promoted the notion that defenseless young Canadian women were being actively pursued or hunted by "pimps and panders" to be shipped across the border or to a foreign land, to work in the sex-entertainment industry (Valverde, 1991:89).

As a result of these fears, single wage-earning women were continually discouraged by moral reformers from attending illegitimate or side-show performances due to the "danger" that was present. Rumors abounded of pretty young women being captured or kidnapped by travelling shows never to be seen again. For example, in 1905, two London girls barely sixteen years old disappeared at the same time that the Midway Marvels left town. Their fathers were sure that the two young ladies had been "tricked or lured" in by the crafty carnival managers and performers. These young women had been seen by several London residents, according to reporters, inside the train with performers from the Midway when it was leaving town on the Sunday morning (*London Free Press*, August 15, 1905, p.5). One of the young women was recovered in Brantford several days later, but the other woman never returned, nor was she heard from again.

Reformers created a moral panic that focused on the morality of the young wage-earning women, who were "victims" of male procurers. It was very difficult for reformers to prevent young wage-earning women from going to the theatre or the carnival, since these forms of entertainment were extremely popular with Ontario youth (Strange, 1995:15). London reform groups used these type of exaggerated stories to scare young women away from public entertainment places because they viewed single wage-earning's presence in entertainment districts as a sign of their economic independence and social autonomy.

Moral panics were also used by reformers to win community support for their moral position. Evidence of reformers' efforts to create a moral panic can be found in a *New York Times* article written by Olive Logan, a middle class feminist and reformer. Logan believed that the burlesque act was a serious threat to public decency, she launched a campaign against women who worked as burlesque dancers denouncing and belittling them by questioning their morality. Nowhere did she mention or call attention to the morality of the male managers or theatre owners who were making huge profits at the expense of women. In 1869 she wrote,

1. Is your hair dyed yellow
2. Are your legs, arms, and bosom symmetrically formed, and are you willing to expose them?
3. Can you sing brassy songs and dance the can-can and wink at men, and give utterance to disgusting half-words, which mean whole actions?
4. Are you acquainted with any rich men who will throw you flowers, and send you presents, and keep afloat dubious rumors concerning your chastity?
5. Are you willing to appear tonight, and every night amid the glare of gas-lights, and before the gaze of thousands of men, in this pair of satin breeches, ten inches long, without a vestige of drapery on your person?

(*New York Times*, May 15, 1869, p.5).

Logan's letter was printed and reprinted in newspapers across the United States during the late nineteenth century (Allen, 1990:124-125). Logan constructed an image of burlesque dancers as the "other," as deviants who lived on the margins of morality. She cleverly

created a picture of women dancers that was in complete contrast to the dominant Victorian ideals of womanhood. Reformers used this type of propaganda to get London residents to accept and support their moral position and, at the same time, cloak their fears of changing women's roles and shifting class distinctions. Middle class moral reformers used moral panics to secure their positions of male power and authority.

In London, reformers created numerous different moral panics of their own. For example an article printed in the *London Advertiser*, which explored changes to the criminal code, indirectly questioned and criticized young wage-earning women who followed popular fads and crazes. The article suggested that if the word "indecent" was replaced by "immodest" in the Canadian criminal code. London police would have to "arrest half the women who walk the streets with their dresses to their knees and their waists cut nearly down to their waists [sic]." The article goes on to suggest that if the wording is changed, London women who choose to wear the latest fashion, or bathing suits, would be in the "same class" as women who dance in burlesque shows (*London Advertiser*, Sept 18, 1917, p.3).

At the turn of the century, reformers believed that they could judge the moral and assumed sexual character of women just by the way that they were dressed. For example, in 1917 several London residents and clergy members wrote letters to the *London Free Press* to express their "concern and disgust" with the way that wage-earning women were dressing when sunbathing on the beach in Port Stanley. In her letter, Mrs. L.R. Chapoton recalled the shocking situation which forced her to cover her eyes in "holy terror." According to Chapoton, the beach was filled with young London and St. Thomas women wearing men's tight fitting bathing suits which exposed their "bare legs almost all the way up to the hips." Chapoton goes on to suggest that it would be to no avail for "Flo Ziegfield to bring his *Roof Garden Chorus* here since it would be entirely too tame now."

As an avid traveler, Chapoton reports that on her travels to Ostend, New Port and Atlantic City, she has "yet to see girls expose themselves so indecently." At the end of this letter Chapoton accuses young London women of having no modesty and urges local police and other officials to protect London's "young, impressionable boys from this form of debauchery of the senses" (*London Free Press*, August 27, 1917, p.8).

Not all moral reformers and concerned London citizens were convinced that young wage-earning women were to blame for their "immodest" appearances. Young, impressionable wage-earning women were seen by some as victims, who had been contaminated by their exposure to the lewd and obscene displays of the female form presented in the burlesque show. As early twentieth century fashion drew more and more from the look and style of stage performers, moral reformers increased their efforts to protect London's wage-earning women from being corrupted by burlesque dancers and their imported ideals of femininity, fashion and taste. Evidence of these efforts can be seen in daily articles in the *London Free Press* and the *London Advertiser* that gave "advice" to young women on how to be a "respectable woman." The Countess Norraikow wrote a column for the *London Advertiser* to educate young London women with her "wisdom of experience" on the role of women, the way that they should dress and conduct themselves in public.

Women on stage

At the turn of the century, most women tried to achieve the thin, delicate, fragile "look" that was associated with beauty. They wore conservative clothing that was in no way revealing or suggestive. Burlesque dancers, however, did just the opposite; they wore very tight corsets with lots of padding that emphasized the roundness of their hips and the fullness of their busts. Burlesque dancers were using their voluptuous figures and

their excessive displays of femininity to mock pre-determined notions of femininity and physical beauty, that women during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were expected to follow.

May Howard was one of the very first "burlesque queens" in Canada at the turn of the century to start her own burlesque company. One of the major stipulations Howard had in hiring burlesque dancers was that they had to be large women, who had to weigh at least one hundred and fifty pounds (Gardner, 1997:153; Toll, 1986: 222). The burlesque dancers' extreme and radical looks were often enhanced by dyeing their hair blonde or bright yellow. They were famous for making fun of the conservative way so called "respectable" women were expected to dress during this time period. Through their comic sketches and exaggerated satire, burlesque dancers bravely challenged middle class notions of masculinity and femininity. For example, burlesque dancers quite often took male parts in the shows, in which they attempted to speak and act like men. Audiences were shocked and fascinated by the boldness and transgressive power of the female performer (Allen, 1991:137).

In addition to their physical appearance, burlesque dancers violated socially prescribed gender norms with their "unladylike" behaviour. During their various skits, the female performers often played instruments that were considered masculine, particularly the banjo and the bugle. Burlesque dancers were known to use "foul or undesirable" language in their acts to shock their audience members (Allen, 1991:148). Their language, as one London reporter stated was "enough to make any virtuous man or woman blush" (*London Free Press*, August 10, 1905). Even the songs that some dancers performed were considered rude and vulgar. Everything that the burlesque dancer did on stage was assumed by their audiences to have a sexual undertone. For example, a burlesque performer could be singing a nursery rhyme or a religious song, but with the

"wink" of an eye or a "wiggle" of the hips the performance automatically became a sexually suggestive act.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was commonly believed by audience members that female actresses led a very "unchaste" lifestyle, in which they kept the company of numerous different male admirers or friends. It was also assumed that actresses worked as prostitutes between their performances or on their time off. Actresses had a bad reputation for being "cheap and easy women," who did not feel the need to conform to socially prescribed behaviour norms (Allen, 1991: 139). A good example of this was Adah Isaacs Menken (otherwise known as the Naked Lady) whose bold and daring lifestyle on and off the stage made her famous. Adah was very different than most wage-earning women of her period. By the time she was thirty three, she had been married and divorced a total of four times. Adah had many male fans with whom she publicly admitted to having affairs (Allen, 1991:99).

The unchaste reputation that burlesque dancers had acquired with audiences in the United States travelled with them into Ontario. Articles and letters published in the *London Free Press* and the *London Advertiser* around the turn of the century questioned the morality of female dancers. Numerous letters written by moral reformers and concerned London citizens complained about the lewd and immoral conduct that occurred in burlesque shows. The letter writers labelled the performers as "degenerates," "semi-civilized creatures" and "bowery girls."²¹ In addition to their letters to local newspapers, moral reformers provided London reporters with their versions or descriptions of the women who they saw performing in these objectionable shows.

²¹ According to Allen (1991:138) Bowery Girls had a bad reputation for flaunting their so-called "economic and domestic independence" by wearing very revealing outfits that emphasized all of their feminine curves. They were often branded by their peers as prostitutes.

Burlesque performers were often described as "girls devoid of any moral sense," "a pretty rough lot" and "a horror to look upon." Reformers often called upon reporters to urge theatre managers and police officials to "clean up or close down" these immoral shows (*London Free Press*, September 14, 1917, p.1).

The motivations of London reporters may have been very different from those of moral reformers. Reporters were less concerned with protecting or guarding the moral values and standards of London residents as they were with writing shocking stories that sold papers. The moral reformers ongoing battle against the commercial amusement industry and the subsequent outbreaks or scandals were very interesting and entertaining news for London residents. Both local newspapers made profits from printing the details of the battles that developed between moral reform groups, police, elected city officials and burlesque dancers. Newspapers also made money from burlesque troupes who paid both London papers to advertise their shows, and to print favourable press releases that burlesque troupes had written themselves (see: *London Advertiser*, July 28, 1908). In 1907, the *London Free Press* ran an ad in the classified section that stated "Young lady wanted for the theatrical profession; experience or talent is not necessary. Apply to Mr.Sears at Bennett's Theatre" (*London Free Press*, October 3, 4, 5, 1907). Ironically, this job ad was placed on the same page which advertised London amusements. Above this job ad ran an announcement that the *Blonde Typewriters* "the greatest girl act around" was performing at the Bennett's Theatre for the next week.

It is not known if any young London woman ever filled this job ad, or the several others just like it that appeared in the two London newspapers during this time period. Fear of recognition and public shame were two very good reasons which likely prevented young London women from taking these types of jobs in their own hometowns. It would have been very easy for audience members to ostracize dancers and ruin their shows if

they recognized them as their friends or neighbours. According to the *Toronto Mail*, such a recognition occurred during a variety show in Toronto at the Lyceum Theatre. A female dancer was recognized by some local audience members and was teased and taunted off the stage. Her hecklers yelled out to her, "Bella McDonald, go home. Your Mother wants you" (*Toronto Mail*, October 13, 1879).

Fatty Arbuckle and the Four Vondas was the only touring variety show that promoted its female performers as local talent. The week of September 3, 1917 Arbuckle and his "Four Vondas" were premiered at the Patricia theatre. The advertisement printed in the entertainment section of the *London Advertiser* claimed the Four Vondas were local women who were "skillful exponents of the terpstchorean art." The names of the four women in this dancing act were never printed, nor were any objections made to this show (*London Advertiser*, September 3, 1917, p.10).

The nationality of most burlesque performers has not been documented. London newspaper reporters and moral reformers believed that most of the women who worked as burlesque dancers were prostitutes or bowery girls, who had been picked up by show managers on their travels across North America. Newspaper reports also suggested that numerous young wage-earning women had run away from their homes and jobs to join burlesque troupes. Burlesque dancers were not high-society ladies, famous actresses, or big stars. Newspapers printed stories to convince London citizens that burlesque dancers were women who had "fallen" to the lowest ranks of society, giving up their respectability for money.

The majority of women who worked as burlesque dancers were Americans, with British and European women following as a close second. However, the very first burlesque troupe to play to American audiences was Lydia Thompson and her British Blondes. Upon their arrival in 1868, Thompson's burlesque act received instant fame and

success in the United States and Canada. Thompson's troupe was made up of four English performers who were already famous with British and European audiences: Ada Harland, Lisa Weber, Pauline Markham and Harry Beckett. The *British Blondes* were well-known for their extraordinary beauty, particularly Markham who was considered to be the most attractive (Allen, 1991:9). Several British acts followed in the direction of the *British Blondes*, particularly Maude Odell who called herself "England's \$10,000 prize beauty for being the most perfectly formed woman in the world" (Lenton, 1983:360). Odell played to audiences across Ontario during the first part of the twentieth century but never received the same level of success or notoriety as the Blondes.

Many other women who worked as burlesque performers in North America were from France. London audiences saw several French burlesque dancing troupes who claimed to be on tour from Bergere, Paris. The *Paris Gaiety Girls Big Burlesque Company* performed at the Grand Opera House in 1885, bringing with them seven (not thirty as their ad suggested) French burlesque dancers (*The London Free Press*, April 22, 1895). The most famous French act to perform in North America was Mme Rentz's Female Minstrels, which toured in Ontario several times. Mme Rentz's troupe did not become popular until they joined forces with M.B Leavitt, the self-proclaimed founder of the American brand of burlesque (Allen, 1991:204). Leavitt restructured the minstrels around the American born Mabel Santley and the show became an instant success (Allen, 1991:195).

This chapter began with a brief discussion on how the theatre worked and the divisions which separated the legitimate and the illegitimate theatre. At the turn of the century class distinctions developed in the theatre which created boundaries between middle class and working class theatre. Moral reformers used these divisions to impose their views of morality upon the working class. Burlesque dancers became the targets of

moral reform because their performances challenged pre-determined gender norms which dictated the ways that women were allowed to act and present their bodies and their sexuality in public places. Single wage-earning women also became the targets of moral reform because their behaviour and participation in working class entertainment publicly defied socially accepted gender norms. Reformers were threatened by single wage-earning women's new found freedom and economic independence. Moral reformers hid their fears of losing their class positions within society beneath a mask of morality. All social, political and cultural issues and anxieties some how became moral problems.

The various strategies reformers used to shape and control the behaviour of burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women in London during the period of 1885 to 1917 is presented in chapter four. The effectiveness of the regulatory techniques reformers in controlling these women is explored. The role of texts and local newspapers in shaping and organizing social relations and people's feelings is examined.

Chapter Four

Strategies Used to Regulate Burlesque Dancers and Single Wage-Earning Women.

The techniques reformers used to regulate the behaviour of burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women is the focus of this chapter. The effectiveness of these techniques used to modify and in some cases close down burlesque shows during the period of 1885 to 1917 is explored. Moral beliefs and practices of clergy members and philanthropists, were acknowledged and recognized by most London residents. However, these moral codes and socially accepted norms were not always practiced or followed since large numbers of patrons attended risqué burlesque acts in side-show tents and illegitimate theatres on a regular basis. Following Valverde's approach to moral reform in Canada, this chapter explores the role of newspapers in organizing and shaping pre-existing social relations. I argue that reformers used local newspapers and constructed censorship boards to circulate their moral views and to exercise their control over the burlesque industry. Reformers attempted to make their moral views hegemonic and internalized by disciplining those individuals whose behaviour violated "public decency norms." Several regulatory techniques were used by reformers including: community watchfulness, gossip, public shame and prosecution.

Local police officials and legal authorities supported and upheld the moral views and related practices of the moral reform movement. The Chief of Police T.T. Williams and Crown Attorney Charles Hutchinson, both active members who were known throughout the city for their strong moral convictions and puritanical outlooks (Armstrong, 1992:178-180, *London Free Press*, January 1, 1886, p.3; July 11, 1927; October 12, 1991 p.6). Police frequently closed down burlesque performances, responding to the

complaints of middle class moral reformers and clergy members even when the shows were popular with working class audiences. London had a very strict moral climate that was very sensitive to anything sexually suggestive in theatrical performances.

Several social historians have written about London's conservative reputation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Miller, 1988; Goodspeed, 1889). Frederick Armstrong (1992), in his examination of obscenity in Victorian London, argues that the city had a stricter moral outlook than the majority of neighbouring communities. Morality played a central role in all aspects of city life, particularly in the organization of leisure time. He refers to the Lotto Davene Poster trial²² as an example of the "bifurcated" moral outlook of the period. London, was essentially two cities in one. It was made up of a small number of upper and middle class reformers who attempted to enforce their strict standards of morality onto the lower working class, who in turn, were more preoccupied with their pursuit of entertainment than with religion or morality (Armstrong, 1992:189-190).

Community standards varied during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Ontario. According to Dubinsky (1993), each region's moral standing was based on rules that the community had set up for itself and on the ways that those rules were enforced. A town or community might have had a very strict set of rules that guided the residents' conduct, however, if those rules were not enforced on a consistent basis the community could not maintain its moral character or reputation (Dubinsky, 1993:68). Dubinsky's ideas fit with Foucault's (1979) argument that discourses are historically specific and the meaning of morality varied by time in history and also by geographic location.

²² The Lotto Davene Poster Trial was explained in detail in chapter three.

Local newspapers

Newspapers organize meaning and social action. They are often used to mediate and coordinate social relations that develop between producers and the consumers of various different and competing discourses. According to Valverde (1991:15) texts have an important role in organizing social relations and people's feelings within society. She argues that texts are one of the main agencies that are used by the dominant groups to determine the experience of others. Texts express the beliefs and ideas of the dominant classes, making those beliefs and ideas appear natural and legitimate (Valverde, 1991:34-43).

Local newspapers were used by moral reform groups to win over the acceptance and support of London residents for their moral views and regulatory actions. Foucault (1979), in his examination of French newspapers during the 1830's and 1840's, suggests that newspapers were used by reformers to create a very specific public perception of delinquents within society. Newspapers printed articles and stories which attempted to convince readers that delinquents were "close by, everywhere present and everywhere feared." Foucault calls this regulatory method the "fait divers." The purpose of the fait divers was to show that the delinquent belonged to an entirely different world and posed a threat to society. He asserts,

The criminal *fait divers*, by its everyday redundancy, makes acceptable the system of judicial and police supervisions that partition society; it recounts from day to day a sort of internal battle against the faceless enemy; in this war it constitutes the daily bulletin of alarm or victory.....Above all, its function was to show that the delinquent belonged to an entirely different world (Foucault, 1979:286).

The purpose or intent of *fait divers* runs parallel to how the *Advertiser* was used to advance, support, and legitimate the moral views and practices of reformers and to assess crimes that were morally dangerous to the rest of society.

London reformers also used the *Advertiser* to manipulate the reporting of local crime. Official crime statistics collected from police court records were printed regularly. For example an article that appeared in the *Advertiser* revealed that "crime was on the increase since the number of indictable offenses is 165 against only 115 last year. Theft, indecent and aggravated assault being the highest" (October 19, 1907). Statistics were used by middle class reformers to show London citizens the devastating side effects of moral decay. The *Advertiser* did not record local crime rates to insinuate that crime was a widespread problem that police could not deal with, but rather to suggest that it was a by-product of moral and social decay. For example in one newspaper a title concerned with crime rates noted that: "Crimes reveal the social character of the communities where they are committed" (*London Advertiser*, February 16, 1872, p.3).

Crime Statistics were also used as a tool by the *Advertiser* to educate local citizens about the sources or causes of immorality and vice. The most popular topics included prostitution, intemperance, seduction and single motherhood. Numerous articles appeared during the period of 1885 to 1917 that addressed each of these social problems. Headlines were another technique used by reformers to incite public concern, outrage and moral panic. For example headlines such as, "Destitute Women Ordered from City" (*London Free Press*, July 8, 1907, p.3) "Crimes of Local Boys Appalling/ Many Now In Custody/ Fathers Overseas/ Mothers Unable To Control Them" (*London Advertiser*, July 19, 1917, p.8). "Altered Criminal Code Cause Arrests of Girls by Scores" (*Advertiser*, September 17, 1917, p.3) "Boys Permitted To See Immoral Dance" (*London Free Press*,

August 11, 1905, p.1) served to support local reform groups efforts to regulate the behaviour of both single wage-earning women and burlesque dancers whom newspapers reported "had gone astray."

Another technique used by the *London Advertiser* was to print letters by outraged local citizens and clergymen. Reverend DS. Hamilton wrote a letter to the *London Advertiser* to denounce local civic authorities and city council members for not forcing Charles Hatch and his *Streets of Cairo* performers out of London after they refused to obey Mayor Campbell's request to get out of town. Hamilton was angry that the mayor and secretary McCann closed the show, on the basis of reformers' complaints and saw "nothing objectionable themselves, except vulgarity in others." He was alarmed that London residents were deceived by high-ranking city police officials. A prominent police official was sent to investigate the Hatch show and reported that he did not see anything "that would make him blush." It was later revealed that the investigation never occurred, it was all a big hoax by police. The only good thing that came out of this scandal, the Reverend Hamilton notes, was that every young man that he spoke to about this show was surprised that the city of London would allow a show like this to be performed (*London Advertiser*. August 14, 1905, p.3).

The Reverend Hamilton was convinced that these types of "vulgar" shows were contrary to public morals and had negative effects on civic life. In his letter to the *Advertiser* he wrote,

I am convinced that the authorities do not interpret the feeling of the citizens at large when they condone anything that is wrong. If the city council endorse the shows they should be censored by the citizens for thrusting upon them exhibitions that they did not want. If the authorities admit they were wrong

then they ought to be forgiven. In any case we should make our present attitude a warning to the authorities which will be of value in future celebrations (*London Advertiser*, August 14, 1905, p.3).

It was the Reverend's belief that making money could not be more important than defending the honor and good name of the city. As he noted, the moral climate of London must not be compromised by "vile" and "degrading" shows, that distort the true idea of womanhood for immoral purposes.

By allowing such performances as took place at the market square last week you are promoting a tendency to such crime. God forbid that I should say anything for the sake of sensationalism. But one of the greatest influences which have felt in my life is that of pure homes going to see such shows. A criminal who reached the end of his life said "I trace my downfall to a look at one immodest picture" (*London Advertiser*, August 14, 1905, p.3).

On August 12, 1905 the *Advertiser* printed a letter it received from Alderman Matthews regarding the *Garden of Allah* performance. In this letter Matthews claims that he never stated to anyone that he saw nothing immoral in the shows. He claims that the *Advertiser* was misinformed and that if the city council minutes were examined it would be revealed that he voted against the show being permitted to perform in the market square. Unfortunately, he argues, the majority of the other council members were in favour of the show (*London Advertiser*, August 12, 1905, p.2).

Regulatory Techniques

Moral reformers used both formal and informal systems of social, moral and sexual regulation to enforce their views and related practices upon single wage-earning women and burlesque dancers. An examination of the *London Free Press* and the *London Advertiser* during the period of 1885 to 1917 reveals several methods of regulation: community watchfulness, gossip, public shame and legal regulation.

Community watchfulness was one regulatory technique reformers relied upon. The close living quarters of city life allowed neighbours the opportunity to monitor the behaviour of other people living near them. Reformers depended on complaints and local gossip from concerned London citizens to keep them informed of any incidents or behaviours that violated norms of immorality and public decency. It was very common for local residents to report theatrical performances that they found to be distasteful, sexually suggestive, or immoral. Clergy members and philanthropy groups were usually the first to receive these complaints, and theatre managers and police were close behind (*London Free Press*, September 15, 1917, p.5). Reverend McCrae revealed to local reporters that he had received numerous calls about a show in which all of the details from the callers agreed in every detail. He stated, "a lady called me last night saying that it [the burlesque performance] was terrible and asked if something could be done" (*London Free Press*, September 17, 1917, p.4; *London Advertiser*, September 17, 1917, p.3).

Several scandals during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century involving burlesque dancers were initiated by outraged citizens who reported their concerns to local ministers. On numerous occasions the clergy members attended the "objectionable" shows themselves. For example, Reverend H.H. Bingham and Reverend Boyd "felt it was their duty to personally visit the hootchy-kootchy show" that was attracting so much

negative attention at the Western fair in 1917 (*London Free Press*, September 15, 1917, p.5; *London Advertiser*, September 15, 1917). Once clergy members and philanthropy groups received enough calls from local residents about "immoral" shows, they reported them to local police and alerted local papers to warn citizens to stay away from these performances.

Community watchfulness and local gossip also played a significant role in controlling the leisure time of single wage-earning women in urban environments. At the turn of the century the range of entertainment forms available to wage-earning women multiplied and their participation in commercial amusements increased. Working class theatre, dancehalls, taverns and saloons eagerly opened their doors to single wage-earning women. Moral reformers were fearful that these new venues for pleasure which were prone to moral laxity could potentially lead wage-earning women into lifestyles of immorality and vice (see: Peiss, 1986; Strange, 1995).

Those young wage-earning women who apparently spent too much of their free time in less respectable places of entertainment with numerous different men became the subjects of neighbourhood gossip and community watchfulness. It was very common for local gossip and rumors to reach these women's parents, who usually attempted to put an end to their daughters presumed misbehaviour and in some cases broke off romances their daughters had started with questionable young men (Dubinsky, 1991:122-125).

Legal regulation and public shame

Legal regulation and public shame were two of the most popular techniques reform groups used to achieve their regulatory aims. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, laws governed everything from how much alcohol a person was allowed to drink to riding street cars on Sunday afternoons (*London Advertiser*, October

19, 1907). Lawyers, judges and police had a great deal of discretionary power in how they applied the law. It was very common for judges to examine the suspected person's background and criminal history before deciding what charges would be laid against them (Backhouse, 1991:6, 94).

During the period of 1885 to 1917, the wording of the Canadian criminal code obstructed local police officials' and magistrates' efforts to remove burlesque dancers from local fairs and theatres. Police officials and moral reformers failed to secure convictions against burlesque dancers and show operators because their dancing was considered immodest or suggestive not indecent. This obstruction made officials so angry that, in September 1917, a group of local moral reformers, composed mostly of ministers, attempted to get some provisions of the Criminal Code, "*Offenses Against Public Morals And Public Convenience*," changed.²³ Reformers wanted the word "indecent" to be replaced by the term "immodest." Concerned clergy members argued that the altered criminal code would give Police Chief Williams and his officers the power they needed to arrest any individuals whose behaviour violated public morals. Police officials were not supportive of the ministers' efforts and claimed that if these words were changed than almost any young London woman could be arrested for this type of behaviour (*London Advertiser*, September 18, 1917, p.3; *City Council Minutes*, 1917).

When reformers did not get "immoral shows" closed down, they turned to local newspapers to criticize and blame police officials for failing to do their jobs. Reformers used the *London Advertiser* to target police, evidenced by such headlines as "No Action By Police" (*London Advertiser*, September 14, 1917, p.2); "Pious Officers Find the

²³ The by-law on public morals stated "That no person or persons shall exhibit sell or offer to sell any indecent or lewd book paper, picture, plate, drawing or other thing nor exhibit or perform any indecent immoral or lewd play within said city (*City Council Minutes*, 1872 p.104. *Criminal Code*, 1892 55 and 56 Vice, c.29. ss.185-188).

Midway Passable" (*London Free Press*, August 10, 1905, p.4) and "Accuse Police of Laxity over London Morals" (*London Advertiser*, September 17, 1917, p.2). Reformers, particularly clergy members, attempted to arouse community awareness and support for their regulatory aims by publicly announcing police officials' inability to deal effectively with immorality and urban vice. Another article that just happened to appear in the September 17 edition of the paper reviewed the performance of the London Police force. The article revealed that London had fewer police for its population than most cities of the United States or Canada, even when the local crime rate had dramatically increased by almost ten percent from 1916 to 1917 as a result of petty theft (*London Advertiser*, September 17, 1917, p.2).

When police officials failed to convict burlesque troupes for immoral shows they reacted to reformers' efforts to publicly shame them by cleaning up some other sources of urban vice. For example, after police failed to find any evidence to convict the Garden of Allah performers, they decided to focus on gambling and prostitution. While watching the burlesque shows, detectives discovered that numerous fair patrons were being swindled out of their money by numerous "flimflam games" that were operating. The permits of four showmen were revoked by police and their booths were closed down and removed from the fair grounds. Police and Western fair officials also forced these showmen to return their "ill-gotten gains" to several fair patrons who complained about being "fleeced" by the old three card trick (*London Advertiser*, September 18, 1917, p.3). During this same week, police raided a well known brothel that local citizens had been complaining about.

London police chief Williams defended police actions in an interview with a local reporter. When asked why it took so long for police to close down this house of ill-fame police chief Williams asserted,

We do not arrest people every time we suspicion[sic] wrong-doing. Our object in these cases is to get convictions and we usually wait until we have secured evidence sufficient to warrant a conviction. As proof of the above statement evidence was given in police court today that a woman keeping a disorderly house has been watched for over three weeks before she was arrested. But she was arrested and the evidence was overwhelming (*London Advertiser*, September 18, 1917, p.3).

This was not the first time that local police raided well known brothels or gambling tents when they could not close down questionable burlesque performances at the Western Fair. On September 24, 1884, Esther Arcott's house of ill-fame, located only a few blocks from the fair, was the target. Fourteen men and several women were arrested. All of the men were later released by a local judge and only a few of the women were held by police for further questioning (*London Free Press*, September 24, 1884; September 25, 1884; *London Advertiser* September 29, 1884).

Censorship committees

After numerous legal road blocks prevented reformers from achieving their regulatory goals, local clergy members from various religious denominations came together to form and organize censorship committees. Prior to 1917, theatre owners, fair officials and city council members had left the censorship of immoral shows up to police. Since reformers could not always get burlesque dancers convicted of "public indecency," they formed censorship committees which were aimed at prevention. The committees would be given

the role of investigating the character of shows and their performers before they were booked by theatre owners or fair officials.

The Ministerial Alliance was one group that was very proactive in London in 1917. Clergy members from local churches conducted regular meetings at the YMCA to discuss police regulation of morality. Reverend J.Hosie, second vice-president of the alliance, told local reporters that London police were far too "lax in taking steps to secure convictions of those engaged in immoral practices" (*London Free Press*, September 15, 1917, p.5). However, not all agreed with these claims: several clergy members saw this social problem in a different light.

Reverend J Silcox, stated that the problem in London was that western fair directors were trying to blame police for not arresting hoochy-koochy dancers and their managers. In his opinion, it was the directors of the fair, who brought these acts into town to make large profits were at fault, not the police. Silcox felt that it was the responsibility of fair officials to screen shows that came to London, to ensure that their content did not violate public standards of morality. They should not have been booking "dirty trash" that have previously removed from other cities (*London Free Press*, September 15, 1917, p.5).

Western Fair secretary, A. M. Hunt, was against the creation of a censorship board because he felt regulation and protection of public morals was the job of local police, not reformers. Western fair president Garthshore, however, disagreed with Hunt. Since he did not want any more bad press to harm the image of the fair, he ruled that a censorship board be appointed immediately. The censorship board was composed of Reverend Snell, Reverend Moyer, and Captain Graham who had volunteered for these positions. Formed in September of 1917, the board continued to operate for several years and proved to be an effective regulatory tool (*London Free Press*, September 15, 1917, p.5; *Western Fair Minutes, 1917*).

Theatrical censorship committees proved to be a powerful force in controlling what London residents saw in the theatre and in side show performances at local fairs and Old Boys' reunions. Censorship boards were guided by strict rules that reflected the moral values of middle class London citizens and clergy members. The views of working class theatre patrons had very little impact on the decisions made by the censorship committees, because these committees were used to secure and uphold middle class interests. This does not mean that reformers' concerns for public morality were not real or genuine. However, reformers regulatory aims' and practices were primarily guided by underlying social, economic and cultural factors.

This chapter has examined the various techniques middle class moral reform groups used to regulate the behaviour of burlesque dancers, single wage-earning women and general members of London's working class at the turn of the century. Local newspapers were one of the primary tools middle class reformers used to win the support and acceptance of London residents for their moral views and regulatory practices. Reformers used newspapers to warn London residents about disreputable burlesque shows that were being presented in theatres and carnival side-shows, in order to deter people from going to see these "immoral performances." Reformers relied on complaints, local gossip and community watchfulness to keep them informed of incidents of immorality and vice within commercial amusement districts and the community. Fear of neighbourhood gossip and community watchfulness also prevented many London residents from going to immoral shows. Being seen in disreputable establishments could ruin people's reputations and in the case of single wage-earning women, get them in trouble with their parents.

Moral reformers used the law to censor and cancel burlesque shows when they could prove that burlesque performances were not only immoral but indecent. Reformers used the *London Advertiser* as their "court of last resort" to access local crime and to circulate

their opinions on the ways that incidents of crime and immorality were dealt with by police and city authorities. When police officials and city council members failed to take action against burlesque shows which reformers deemed to be immoral reformers wrote letters to the *London Advertiser* to complain about police and city council members moral laxity. Reformers used local newspapers to publicly shame police and city council members. Censorship boards were formed by various local clergymen in 1917. These boards were used by reformers to screen theatrical groups before they were allowed to perform in London theatres and local fairs. Middle class reformers employed very effective strategies to deter burlesque troupes from performing in London theatres. However, their regulatory techniques never completely prevented female dancers from performing in London theatres and side-shows. Both burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women continued to find ways to resist moral reformers' regulatory aims.

CONCLUSION

This thesis began by examining the various ways that burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women were the targets of moral regulation. It has been argued that moral reformers were a powerful force in controlling the behaviour of both burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women in London during the period of 1885 to 1917. In this study it has been shown that moral reformers considered the behaviour of these women a serious social problem that needed to be supervised and regulated. Burlesque dancers were viewed as a threat by moral reformers because their excessive displays of femininity and sexuality violated the assumed norms for women at the turn of the century. Reformers characterized burlesque dancer's scanty costumes, foul humour and transgressive displays of sexuality as "exotic, alien, dirty and unworthy." Single wage-earning women were also viewed as a problem to reformers who were threatened by the economic independence and social autonomy women gained through waged labour.

Throughout this study it has been argued that moral reformers slipped their fears of changing women's roles, the disintegration of the family and class differences into the regulation of burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women. The various techniques reformers used to deal with these fears were revealed. The most effective technique used in attempt to control the behaviour of female dancers and single wage-earning women was the creation of moral panics. According to Valverde, one of the principal mechanisms of a moral panic was the construction of a threat (Valverde, 1991:89). Exaggerated stories and false tales of sexual and physical danger in urban settings were employed by reformers to frighten single wage-earning women away from commercial amusements and the public sphere. Despite the fact that moral panics were based on

inaccurate information, they were treated as a real problem by the majority of Canadian citizens during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Valverde, 1991:89).

By creating a threat, moral panics served to support and legitimate the social and moral regulation of burlesque dancers and single wage earning women. Reformers attempted to win public support for their regulation of these women by attempting to convince others that burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women were not as morally pure as was generally believed. Reformers labelled these "frivolous groups of women" as people who could be easily enticed into disreputable lifestyles. According to Strange (1995), despite reformers recognition of both men and women's yearning for fun and entertainment, they continually blamed the "inappropriate" ways that single wage-earning women spent their leisure time as the primary cause of immorality and vice. Moral reformers disliked commercial amusements because they created an opportunity for young men and women to meet; they also gave women an outlet to flaunt and enjoy their social and economic independence, thereby publicly rejecting gender norms (Strange, 1995:119-121).

In this thesis it has been shown that moral panics were used by reformers to punish women who publicly defied male power and questioned men's right to control them. They were also used by reformers to cover up the real sources of danger and vice. The primary source of danger for both burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women did not come from their pursuit of amusement, sexual immorality or even urban vice as reformers had suggested; danger was rooted in men's power and authority over women at the turn of the century. For Valverde (1991) moral panics allowed moral reformers to admit that Canadian cities were dangerous places for young wage-earning women during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century "without attacking the patriarchal and class relations that produced such dangers" (Valverde, 1991:103). By focusing on the dangers

of urban centres reformers attempted to legitimate their hypocritical practice of punishing only women for engaging in the temptations of immorality and urban vice. Reformers did not acknowledge that "fallen men" were the primary organizers and consumers of sexual immorality. The morality of men who visited prostitutes, demanded sex from their dates and went to burlesque shows were never questioned. Instead, reformers punished burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women for their participation in these acts.

In London, at the turn of the century, moral reformers relied upon local newspapers to circulate their views and to alert residents to the potential dangers of immorality and vice. Newspapers were the main form of communication at the turn of the century and were the most effective regulatory technique employed by reformers. Reformers used *The London Advertiser* and *The London Free Press* to spread moral panics by convincing readers that London's moral climate was being threatened by the immoral behaviour of burlesque dancers and single wage-earning women. Reformers used local papers to prevent London residents from going to see disreputable burlesque shows and to complain about the moral laxity of elected city officials and police in regulating burlesque performances (see: *London Free Press*, August 10, 1917; *London Advertiser*, September 14, 1917).

The battles between reformers and wage-earning women were very common in Canada and the United States and were presented in many early films produced in the United States during the 1910s and 1920s. These films made fun of moral reformers' efforts to prevent wage-earning women from dating, going to dance halls and having fun. Film makers presented images of street smart women who could easily ward off any sexual advances they received from their bosses, co-workers and their dates. Single wage-earning women were presented in films as quick thinking, fast talking women who were always one step ahead of their male harassers. The 1908 film, *Mashing the Masher*, depicts two young women who make plans to get even with a man who was continually

making sexual advances toward them. The female actors arranged a meeting with their target on a busy street corner, when the man arrives the women get their brothers, who are waiting in the building above them to dump garbage on the man's head to "mash the masher" (Peiss, 1986:157).

In London, moral reformers' preoccupation with keeping wage-earning women out of commercial amusements became so extreme that even the morality of women who rode bicycles in "pant-like bloomers" was criticized and seriously questioned. Although bloomers concealed the natural contours of the female body, bloomers still displayed the lower calf and the ankle to the public view. During the late nineteenth century this type of behaviour was considered to be indecent and risqué (*London Free Press*, August 14, 1895, p.3). The hysteria and uproar that wearing these bloomers evoked, for example, can be found in a letter written by the editor of the *Dominion Medical Monthly*, which stated "bicycle riding was the latest outlet for carnal passion. Bicycle riding produces in the female a distinct orgasm" (Kinsman, 1987:84).

Few burlesque dancers wrote personal memoirs of their lives as female performers or recorded their attitudes of their roles in the burlesque industry. Very little information is known about the relationship female dancers had with their managers or the other women within the troupes. It is unknown what burlesque dancers' lives were like travelling across Canada and the United States at the turn of the century during changing and troubling times. It is also unknown if female dancers found the social and economic independence and the sexual power they gain through their performances empowering. Most of the information written about burlesque dancers is based on articles moral reformers and theatre critics wrote about them. Olive Logan,²⁴ one of the most avid critics of burlesque

²⁴ Olive Logan. *Apropos of Women and Theatres*. New York: Carleton, 1867.

during the 1870s, wrote an entire book on her personal objections to female dancers. Playbills, press releases and advertisements written by show managers provided very little information on the female dancers themselves. Women's roles and contributions within the theatre during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century have been overlooked. Numerous theatre records and primary documents have not been recovered and remain hidden in attic trunks and drawers. Due to the variety of these documents they are often scattered and unorganized in archival collections and in many cases, documents are poorly preserved.

This thesis contributes to the literature on moral regulation and moral reform in Canada at the turn of the century. This research is unique in that it is the first in depth study done on the burlesque industry in London from 1885 to 1917. Many other studies have focused on the theatre in London (see: Brown, 1990; Frazer, 1988) and local performance halls, theatre structures and designs (Fairfield, 1990); none, however, have specifically examined the moral regulation of burlesque dancers or single wage-earning women. The problem of obscenity in London during the late nineteenth century was examined by Armstrong (1991) who focused on local reform groups' reactions to nudity in art, advertisements, and the Lotto Davene poster. Armstrong does not directly discuss the burlesque theatre or reformers' reactions to female dancers. His work is useful to this thesis because it shows that London residents had a conservative moral outlook towards the representation of femininity and the female body.

The findings of this thesis reveal that London was a thriving theatrical centre during the period of 1885 to 1917 that presented burlesque performances on a regular basis in legitimate and illegitimate theatres. Burlesque acts could also be found in side-show tents at the Western fair and the Old Boys' Reunion. The moral views of middle class reformers carried considerable weight in London at the turn of the century. These moral

views and regulatory actions were used in attempt to control and punish single wage-earning women and burlesque dancers who were unwilling to accept their assumed roles as wives and mothers. Throughout this thesis it has been argued that moral reform groups invented the category of female delinquent to encourage the inspection of women's moral characters and to legitimate reformers' regulatory aims and practices.

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APPENDIX A



Poster that resulted in Charles Hutchinson's prosecution of Frank Kerchmer for displaying indecent pictures in public, London, Ontario, December 1885-January 1886.

APPENDIX B

COMING!

AT GRAND OPERA HOUSE, LONDON,

Saturday, April 20, '95

PARIS GAIETY GIRLS

BIG

BURLESQUE COMPANY

30-BEAUTIFUL LADIES-30

ONE OF THE MANY FEATURES

THE FRENCH DANCERS

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Mlle. Nanon Pascol.

Mlle. Julio Dupoy,

Mlle. Aenritte Marbor.

The most Daring, Unique and Bewildering of
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VITA AUCTORIS

NAME: Kelly Mac Donald

PLACE OF BIRTH: London, Ontario

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1967

EDUCATION: Catholic Central High School
1984-1988

University of Western Ontario, King's College
1988-1994, B.A

University of Windsor
1994-1999, M.A