

In the 1890s, conceptions of sisterhood were dramatically altered as the Woman Question acquired new urgency with the emergence of the New Woman. Much of the social debate surrounding the New Woman connected this cultural figure to women's social work and the associations they founded to do that work. These organizations focused on individual issues such as women's suffrage and education, and enabled women to work in the public sphere without male supervision. As women formed these chosen sisterhoods around reform issues, Victorians became increasingly concerned about the threat such all-women organizations posed to separate spheres ideology and patriarchal control in general. The already vexed and problematic sister bond (as I will discuss in my introduction) was being strengthened into an affective relationship that offered women public as well as private fulfillment. These female social reformers made chosen sisterhood a bond that could supplant and even replace the conventional domestic space and occupy the center of women's affective lives. Thus the New Woman as a sister figure represents a challenge to Victorian femininity in constructing her identity in terms of a woman-centered space that is both familial and professional. Victorians viewed these sisterhoods as corrupting the supposedly pure love of biological sisters into a decidedly un-heteronormative model. Rhoda Broughton, one of the period's most popular novelists, enacts these anxieties in her 1897 anti-New Woman novel, *Dear Faustina*.